United Nations S/PV.8169

Security Council

Seventy-third year

Provisional

8169th meeting

Tuesday, 30 January 2018, 10.15 a.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Umarov	(Kazakhstan)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Llorentty Soliz
	China	Mr. Shen Bo
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Tanoh-Boutchoue
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Ndong Mba
	Ethiopia	Mr. Woldegerima
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Kuwait	Mr. Alotaibi
	Netherlands	Mrs. Gregoire Van Haaren
	Peru	Mr. Meza-Cuadra
	Poland	Ms. Wronecka
	Russian Federation	Mr. Polyanskiy
	Sweden	Mr. Skoog
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Allen
	United States of America	Ms. Tachco

Agenda

The situation in the Central African Republic

Letter dated 6 December 2017 from the Panel of Experts on the Central African Republic extended pursuant to resolution 2339 (2017) addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2017/1023)

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the translation of speeches delivered in other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room U-0506 (verbatimrecords@un.org). Corrected records will be reissued electronically on the Official Document System of the United Nations (http://documents.un.org).

18-02474 (E)

Accessible document Please recycle

The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Central African Republic

Letter dated 6 December 2017 from the Panel of Experts on the Central African Republic extended pursuant to resolution 2339 (2017) addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2017/1023)

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of the Central African Republic to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

Members of the Council have before them document S/2018/73, which contains the text of a draft resolution submitted by France.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2017/1023, which contains a letter dated 6 December 2017 from the Panel of Experts on the Central African Republic extended pursuant to resolution 2339 (2017) addressed to the President of the Security Council.

The Council is ready to proceed to the vote on the draft resolution before it. I shall put the draft resolution to the vote now.

A vote was taken by show of hands.

In favour:

Bolivia (Plurinational State of), China, Côte D'Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea, Ethiopia, France, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Netherlands, Peru, Poland, Russian Federation, Sweden, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and United States of America

The President: The draft resolution received 15 votes in favour. The draft resolution has been adopted unanimously as resolution 2399 (2018).

I now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements after the vote.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): France welcomes the unanimous adoption of resolution 2399 (2018), renewing the sanctions regime on the Central African Republic. Following the adoption of resolution 2387 (2017), renewing the mandate of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) last November, this resolution is a new sign of the Council's full attention to the situation in the Central African Republic. In that context, that I would like to underline three points.

First, the resolution similarly renews the measures concerning the arms embargo, the travel bans and the assets freeze. This system is still very relevant in the light of the current situation in the Central African Republic. Armed groups are, unfortunately, still present in a large part of the territory and continue to obtain supplies through illicit flows of arms and ammunition from neighbouring countries. They also exploit the illicit trafficking of natural resources to enrich themselves. In this context, it is absolutely essential that all Member States come together to fully respect the sanctions regime so that it can be effectively implemented in the service of peace in the Central African Republic.

In addition, the exemption and notification procedures remain effective tools allowing for the Central African defence and security forces to be trained, equipped and armed, while limiting the risk of arms proliferation. They also support the Central African authorities in their security sector reform process and in their strategy of extending State authority.

To conclude on this point, it is important to support the efforts of MINUSCA in the fight against arms trafficking. To that end, the tasks of the working group established within the Mission are specified so that it can contribute to a better implementation of the embargo. For example, it will be able to transmit recommendations concerning weapons seizures when trafficking routes have been identified.

Secondly, the resolution also sheds light on incitement to violence, whether ethnic, religious or against MINUSCA. Such incitement is a scourge for the Central African Republic and at the root of violence that claims too many casualties, among both the civilian population and the Blue Helmets. In that context, the perpetrators of these incitements to violence must now know that their actions will not go unpunished. Beyond the action undertaken by the Central African justice system and international justice, the sanctions

regime on the Central African Republic will now punish individuals who incite to violence, given their potential to undermine peace, stability and security in the Central African Republic. There can be no lasting peace in the Central African Republic if such incitement continues, and the Security Council intends to assume its responsibilities.

In the same vein, I would also like to point out that attacks on humanitarian workers are now recognized as a designation criterion equal to, for example, attacks on MINUSCA. The proliferation of such attacks, which make the Central African Republic one of the most dangerous countries in the world for that profession, is unacceptable. Once again, we have sent a strong signal to those who would attack the women and men whose work is indispensable for people in need.

Finally, the resolution paves the way for the development of criteria to assess the impact of the arms embargo on the Central African Republic. While we are not considering, in the short term, a loosening of the arms embargo, taking into account the current situation in the country, this is a question of showing that the arms embargo will be able to evolve at the right time, including in the light of progress of security sector reform.

In the specific case of the Central African Republic, sanctions are obviously not an end in themselves, but a means to contributing to our shared goal, which is the stabilization of and the return of lasting peace to the Central African Republic.

In that context, I will conclude by reiterating France's full support for President Faustin Archange Touadéra, as well as for the African Initiative for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic, in their efforts to reach a comprehensive political agreement and reconciliation of all those of the Central African Republic.

Mr. Tanoh-Boutchoue (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): My delegation welcomes today the Security Council's unanimous adoption of resolution 2399 (2018), which extends the sanctions regime against the Central African Republic for one year. We hope that the implementation of its provisions will allow for significant progress to be made in resolving the crisis in that brotherly country.

As Chair of the Committee established pursuant to resolution 2127 (2013) concerning the Central African Republic, Côte d'Ivoire thanks all delegations for their flexibility and the constructive spirit that led to a balanced and consensual text, which was accepted by all. My delegation reiterates its readiness to work with the Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo and all Member States, in particular the countries of the region, in implementing the present sanctions regime, with a view to finding lasting solutions to the serious crisis affecting the Central African Republic.

In the light of the many remaining challenges to be faced, renewing the sanctions regime against the Central African Republic appears to be amply justified. Indeed, efforts aimed at the gradual restoration of State authority throughout the country are being undermined by the destabilizing activity of armed groups, which negatively affect the peace and reconciliation process under way in the Central African Republic. Today's resolution seeks to strike a balance between the need to encourage the Central African State to ensure its sovereignty throughout the country and the imperative to disable armed groups whose destructive capacity has well been established.

In that regard, the Côte d'Ivoire welcomes the 2127 Committee's commitment to carefully considering developments concerning the arms embargo within the overall framework of security sector reform, as well as the work of the Central African authorities to improve the security situation. Moreover, my country welcomes steps made towards operationalizing the National Commission to Combat the Proliferation and Illegal Movement of Small Arms and Light Weapons. Through resolution 2399 (2018), the Committee has added criteria for imposing sanctions, including inflammatory speech of an ethnic, religious or other nature, and incitement to violence, as well as attacks against humanitarian workers.

Based on its recent experience, Côte d'Ivoire reaffirms its belief that sanctions, when strictly respected and imposed, constitute an effective mechanism that can complement the Council's actions in resolving conflicts that continue to face States. My country therefore encourages the Government of the Central African Republic and all stakeholders to persevere in their efforts to find a lasting solution to the crisis, and assures them of its full support for the definitive return of peace and stability in the Central African Republic.

Lastly, Côte d'Ivoire calls for synergy among the Central African authorities, the States of the region and the United Nations, facilitated by the Group of Experts and the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic, with a view to effectively implementing the sanctions regime so as to find a lasting solution to the crisis in the Central African Republic.

Mrs. Gregoire Van Haaren (Netherlands) (*spoke in French*): The Kingdom of the Netherlands welcomes the unanimous adoption of resolution 2399 (2018). While the Central African Republic remains engulfed in crisis, the Security Council today has sent a strong message to those violating human rights and international humanitarian law that the world is watching them. In particular, the Kingdom of the Netherlands is concerned about religious and ethnic leaders and politicians in the Central African Republic who are using their power to incite violence and hatred among the people of that country. We call on them to end all forms of hate speech and to use their influence to build peace.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands is also concerned about the increase in violence against humanitarian workers. Organizations like Médecins Sans Frontières have had to cease operations in some parts of the country, and the Central African Republic is today one of the most dangerous countries in the world for aid workers. Through today's resolution, the Council honours those who have made the ultimate sacrifice in providing indispensable support to the people of the Central African Republic. Those who have perpetrated acts of violence against humanitarian workers cannot go unpunished.

Sanctions alone will not resolve the crisis in the Central African Republic, and we call on all parties involved to commit to the peace process within the framework of the African Initiative for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African. By renewing the sanctions regime through resolution 2399 (2018), which we adopted today, the Security Council is sending a strong message for peace.

The meeting rose at 10.25 a.m.

United Nations S/PV.8170

Security Council

Seventy-third year

Provisional

8170th meeting

Tuesday, 30 January 2018, 10.25 a.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Umarov	(Kazakhstan)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Llorentty Soliz
	China	Mr. Shen Bo
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Tanoh-Boutchoue
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Ndong Mba
	Ethiopia	Mr. Woldegerima
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Kuwait	Mr. Alotaibi
	Netherlands	Mrs. Gregoire Van Haaren
	Peru	Mr. Meza-Cuadra
	Poland	Ms. Wronecka
	Russian Federation	Mr. Polyanskiy
	Sweden	Mr. Skoog
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Allen
	United States of America	Ms. Tachco

Agenda

Peace consolidation in West Africa

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the translation of speeches delivered in other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room U-0506 (verbatimrecords@un.org). Corrected records will be reissued electronically on the Official Document System of the United Nations (http://documents.un.org).

18-02490 (E)

Accessible document Please recycle

The meeting was called to order at 10.25 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Peace consolidation in West Africa

The President: The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

The Council has before it the text of a statement by the President on behalf of the Council on the subject of today's meeting. I thank Council members for their valuable contributions to this statement. In accordance with the understanding reached among the members of the Council, I shall take it that the members of the Security Council agree to the statement, which will be issued as a document of the Security Council under the symbol S/PRST/2018/3.

The meeting rose at 10.30 a.m.

United Nations S/PV.8171

Security Council

Seventy-third year

Provisional

8171st meeting

Tuesday, 30 January 2018, 10.35 a.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Umarov	(Kazakhstan)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Llorentty Soliz
	China	Mr. Shen Bo
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Tanoh-Boutchoue
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Ndong Mba
	Ethiopia	Mr. Woldegerima
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Kuwait	Mr. Alotaibi
	Netherlands	Mrs. Gregoire Van Haaren
	Peru	Mr. Meza-Cuadra
	Poland	Ms. Wronecka
	Russian Federation	Mr. Safronkov
	Sweden	Mr. Skoog
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Allen
	United States of America	Mr. Miller

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016) and 2393 (2017) (S/2018/60)

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the translation of speeches delivered in other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room U-0506 (verbatimrecords@un.org). Corrected records will be reissued electronically on the Official Document System of the United Nations (http://documents.un.org).

18-02496 (E)

Accessible document Please recycle

The meeting was called to order at 10.35 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016) and 2393 (2017) (S/2018/60)

The President: In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Ms. Ursula Mueller, Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2018/60, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016) and 2393 (2017).

I now give the floor to Ms. Mueller.

Ms. Mueller: I thank you, Mr. President, for this opportunity to provide the Security Council with an update on the humanitarian situation in Syria.

Years of conflict have caused immeasurable human suffering and left countless civilians dead, injured or missing. The United Nations estimates that 13.1 million people are in need of protection and humanitarian assistance, including 6.1 million people who are displaced within the country. Another 5.5 million people have fled the conflict across borders into neighbouring countries. The Council will have heard at first hand the account of the Emergency Relief Coordinator in his statement to the Security Council on 22 January with regard to his visit to Syria, in which he highlighted the plight of the Syrian people. During the visit, he heard individual stories from some of the people caught up in the violence and conflict. In Homs, he saw entire districts of the city reduced to rubble. The visit was the first for an Emergency Relief Coordinator in more than two years. It was an important opportunity to see ways in which the United Nations can support people in need. It was also a chance to hold discussions with the Government of Syria and our humanitarian partners on how to address some of the most pressing humanitarian needs.

As fighting continues, I am particularly concerned about the safety and protection of civilians caught up in the violence in north-west Syria, where hostilities have reportedly caused numerous deaths and injuries. Air strikes and fighting in southern Idlib and northern Hama have resulted in more than 270,000 displacements since 15 December 2017, driving people from their homes to other areas of Idlib. Camps for displaced people are overstretched, forcing most of those displaced to seek shelter in some 160 makeshift settlements. During the cold and wet winter months, many families have nothing else but improvised tents, which they share with others.

Attacks on medical facilities and vital infrastructure continue, with reports of at least 16 attacks on health-care facilities during the month of December alone. Yesterday Médecins Sans Frontières reported that air strikes had hit a hospital it supports in the Saraqib district of Idlib, causing five deaths, injuring others and seriously damaging the facility, which is now closed. That was the second reported strike on the facility in nine days.

Further north, in Afrin, in Aleppo governorate, the United Nations is carefully monitoring the situation of over 300,000 people living in the district, which is experiencing fighting. We have reports of civilian casualties and that approximately 15,000 people have been displaced within the district, with another 1,000 displaced to Aleppo governorate. We have also received reports that local authorities inside Afrin are restricting civilian movement, particularly for those who want to leave.

I am also concerned about the situation in eastern Ghouta and areas of Damascus, where civilian deaths and destruction of civilian infrastructure continue to be reported. In the first 10 days of the year, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights documented at least 81 civilians killed in the enclave, including 25 women and 30 children. Scores of residential buildings in the area have been damaged or destroyed in recent weeks. I also note with concern that shelling continues from eastern Ghouta into Damascus, resulting in civilian deaths and injuries.

Although 29 patients in urgent need of medical care were allowed out of eastern Ghouta in late December, hundreds more, most of them women and children, require immediate medical attention. So far, there have

been 21 civilian deaths among those waiting for and needing medical evacuation. Their needs are critical, and the law is clear. I urge all parties, and all those with influence over the parties, to see to it that all such medical evacuations take place without conditions or delay.

With reference to all of the flashpoints I have highlighted, I call on the parties to ensure the protection of civilians and civilian and medical infrastructure, in line with international humanitarian law, and to ensure the safe, sustained and unimpeded delivery of humanitarian assistance to all in need.

I would also like to take this opportunity to reiterate my concern about the protection situation in the city of Raqqa, where returns continue despite the widespread presence of explosive remnants of war. Nearly 60,000 individuals have reportedly returned since the end of hostilities in October 2017. However, humanitarian partners continue to emphasize that, given the high prevalence of landmines, booby traps and unexploded ordinance, Raqqa is not safe for civilian returns.

Deaths and injuries due to explosions have been reported with alarming frequency, and trauma cases nearly doubled in recent months. More than 534 civilians have been injured in blasts since the expulsion of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant from the city in October 2017, of whom 112 people died. Each week, between 30 and 50 civilians continue to arrive at trauma centres in Raqqa after being wounded by improvised explosive devices concealed in their homes and neighbourhoods. Risk from explosive hazards is not limited to Raqqa; there are indications that substantial contamination also exists throughout Deir ez-Zor governorate, where there has been little or no mine surveying or clearance.

Despite the desperate humanitarian needs in many areas in Syria, the United Nations and humanitarian partners continue to face serious challenges in accessing those in need. Last month, I briefed the Council that none of our cross-line convoys were able to reach besieged locations and that only two convoys had accessed hard-to-reach areas. This month, the United Nations and its partners have had no access to any such locations at all. Not one convoy has been able to deploy. Discussions about convoys have stalled over requirements to lower the number of beneficiaries and about splitting convoys in a way that would not allow us to provide food or other essential items. Our deliveries must continue to be based on humanitarian principles and international humanitarian law, impartially based on civilian need.

At the same time, the United Nations is also seeing access to areas previously reached under regular programming coming to a halt. Local authorities in north-east Syria have twice held humanitarian convoys at the checkpoint with Government-controlled areas in eastern Aleppo. Furthermore, local authorities have requested changes related to the operations of our non-governmental partners, which in turn has blocked our assistance delivery to much of north-east Syria. The situation has been further compounded by the refusal of the Governor of Hassakah to issue facilitation letters for our deliveries. While the cross-border operations of our partners continue, such assistance is not sufficient to meet the needs in the north-east. To solve the situation, I call on all parties and those with influence over them to engage now to see that access to those areas resume.

Finally, due to insecurity in the north-west, which has included numerous rocket attacks from within Syria into Turkey, on 20 January the United Nations temporarily suspended cross-border deliveries at the two authorized border crossing points in Turkey. The United Nations remains in discussion with Turkish authorities on restarting operations as quickly as possible to ensure the continued delivery of assistance, which hundreds of thousands of Syrians rely upon every month.

Those access challenges underscore the importance of using all the modalities of delivery at our disposal. Despite prevailing challenges, the United Nations and its partners have continued to reach millions of people in need each month. For example, in December, regular programming from within the country resulted in the delivery of humanitarian assistance to millions of people, including over 3 million people who received food assistance through 1,500 deliveries. The United Nations and its partners also provided health, protection and education services. Cross-border assistance also continued to reach hundreds of thousands of people in need, as 653 trucks delivered food assistance to more than 500,000 people, health assistance for over 600,000 treatments, as well as other support for hundreds of thousands.

After almost eight years of conflict, people's needs are as vast as they are critical. The United Nations and its partners will continue to deliver to millions of

people in need. The United Nations also stands ready to bolster such support, but requires efficient and effective mechanisms to ensure the safe and rapid delivery of aid. To that end, the Emergency Relief Coordinator has identified five areas where the United Nations is looking to make concrete progress.

First, we need to finalize the United Nations humanitarian response plan for 2018, for which we will be seeking $3.5 billion to meet the needs of more than 13 million people in all parts of Syria.

Secondly, it is important that there be an agreement on medical evacuations for hundreds of critically ill people trapped in besieged eastern Ghouta. People in other besieged areas should get the same assistance.

Thirdly, humanitarian access needs to improve. The United Nations has requested agreement for three to four United Nations and Syrian Arab Red Crescent inter-agency cross-line convoys each week. We need consistent access to all people in need.

Fourthly, we must reach agreement on the United Nations-supported aid convoys from Damascus to Rukban in south-eastern Syria. While the exceptional delivery of assistance from Jordan in early January was a positive development, a sustainable solution is required.

Fifthly, more effective arrangements are needed to enable the United Nations to support the work of Syrian non-governmental organizations and to enable international non-governmental organizations to perform the stronger role they can, and are ready to, play in relieving the suffering.

I hope that we will be able to report to the Security Council next month on real progress achieved in those five key areas, and that, month after month, we will move forward until they are all fully addressed.

The President: I thank Ms. Mueller for her briefing.

I shall now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements.

Mr. Allen (United Kingdom): I thank Assistant Secretary-General Mueller for her briefing.

When considering the Syria humanitarian issue, we always have in mind the powerful plea last December by the Russian Permanent Representative that we should keep our differences over the politics in Syria out of our consideration of humanitarian issues — a view that we strongly continue to endorse.

Last week, Mark Lowcock briefed us on his visit to Syria. It was the first time that an Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs had visited Syria in more than two years, having been blocked previously from visiting. The United Kingdom commends the Under-Secretary-General's efforts to start a meaningful dialogue between the United Nations and the Syrian regime in order to improve the humanitarian situation for the people of Syria. On the basis of discussions and as we iterated today, the Under-Secretary-General set out five clear asks to enable the United Nations to sustain and improve its aid efforts. The United Kingdom fully supports those asks. Unfortunately, the Security Council has been unable to reach agreement on a text that would unanimously call upon the Syrian regime to ensure that those five asks are granted without delay. I want to reflect on this disappointing situation.

One of the five key asks of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs is the regime's agreement to allow three or four United Nations and Syrian Arab Red Crescent convoys each week across front lines to provide assistance to up to 2.5 million people in besieged and hard-to-reach areas. These convoys are needed to deliver aid, including both food and medical supplies, to civilians who have lived in a war zone for almost seven years. That request for consistent, regular access to all people in need is crucial. In 2017, only 27 per cent of United Nations inter-agency convoy requests were approved by the Syrian regime in full. That is significantly worse than in 2016, when 45 per cent of requests were approved. Assistant Secretary-General Mueller's briefing was especially concerning in that respect. We cannot let that happen again in 2018.

Ninety-four per cent of those living under siege are located in eastern Ghouta. The Al-Assad regime is using humanitarian aid as a weapon of war by restricting access to the besieged population. There were no aid deliveries to the area for the whole of December, and nearly 12 per cent of children under five years of age in eastern Ghouta suffer from acute malnutrition. It is appalling that innocent children are once again suffering the most. The Under-Secretary-General also requested the immediate evacuation of hundreds of people who are in need of medical assistance from eastern Ghouta. We call on those who can influence the regime to use all of their authority to allow for rapid, unhindered and sustained humanitarian access and medical evacuations

for those in need. According to the Secretary-General, 18 people have already died while waiting for the regime's permission to leave the besieged city. People are dying for want of health care and services that are available fewer than 10 miles away, in Damascus.

Let us recall that the backdrop of the Under-Secretary-General's visit was the escalation in air strikes in eastern Ghouta and the north-west, including Aleppo, Idlib governorate and northern Hama. Yesterday at least five people, including a child, were killed by an air strike on a hospital supported by Médecins sans frontières in Syria's Idlib governorate. The facility was also seriously damaged and at least six people, including three medical staff, were injured as a result of the attack. The air strikes on the hospital occurred while the doctors were receiving people who had been injured an hour earlier in another air strike on a market. Those strikes had already killed 11 people.

These events are taking place are in areas where there are meant to be ceasefires with the stated aim of putting a prompt end to violence and improving the humanitarian situation. Unfortunately for the people of Syria, that could not be further from the reality. The deliberate targeting of civilians and civilian infrastructure in Idlib and eastern Ghouta continues, in blatant violation of international humanitarian law and human rights law. The intensification of hostilities has displaced approximately 270,000 people within Idlib since 15 December 2017, stretching scarce resources beyond their limits. The escalation of air strikes in eastern Ghouta has resulted in hundreds of civilian deaths since 30 December. UNICEF reports that, in the first 14 days of 2018, more than 30 children were killed by escalating violence in the enclave.

It is against that backdrop that I call on the regime to allow for immediate, safe and unhindered access to humanitarian assistance to meet fully the needs of those who require food and medical supplies. Let all with influence exert it to ensure that. It is our must crucial, immediate request. It is also imperative that all parties adhere to agreed ceasefires and cessations of hostilities, uphold international humanitarian law and protect civilians.

Yesterday, a number of us visited the United States National Holocaust Museum's exhibition on Syria. We saw the photographs of those killed and tortured by the regime and we read their biographies, their life stories. It had a profound effect on me, and it brought home how the tragedy in Syria is not just a geopolitical one — it is a human one. For humanity's sake, all of us around this table must ensure that we have done our all.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank Ms. Ursula Mueller for her comprehensive briefing. I reiterate France's full support for the recommendations of the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Mr. Mark Lowcock, which Ms. Mueller has just referenced.

I would also like to express my country's grave concerns about the latest developments in the humanitarian situation in Syria. Several points are of particular concern. We note the extremely dire situation of the population in eastern Ghouta — still besieged and denied the humanitarian assistance and medical evacuations that they need — and the escalation of violence, particularly in the Idlib region. In addition, we are concerned about the attacks on hospitals, medical facilities and the provision of health care, as well as the persistent restrictions on humanitarian access in Syria, which are unacceptable and have tightened further in recent weeks — denying the civilian population the access to the essential resources that they so vitally need. Accordingly, I should like to make three main observations.

First, we are particularly concerned about the current escalation of violence in eastern Ghouta and the Idlib region, which adds to the suffering of the affected populations. In eastern Ghouta, 400,000 civilians are victims of almost daily bombings by the regime and its allies. According to the World Health Organization, approximately 750 people in eastern Ghouta are still waiting for emergency medical evacuation. Since 30 December, the wounded have been unable to be transported out of eastern Ghouta to receive care; 21 others have died from their wounds, unable to wait another day. We note and stress that it is the responsibility of the Syrian regime to allow those medical evacuations to proceed without delay.

The situation in the south of Idlib and in the north of Hama is very worrying as well. The continued bombings led to the displacement of about 250,000 civilians last month. More than 33 people were reportedly killed in less than 24 hours. The town of Sarakab was bombed yesterday morning, and the strikes hit the town market, killing more than 11 people and injuring a number of others. One hour later, the only public hospital in the district — a hospital supported by the non-governmental

organization Médecins Sans Frontières — was struck, killing five people, including a child, and injuring six others, including medical staff.

France very firmly condemns attacks on health-care workers and medical infrastructure, as well as the indiscriminate bombings carried out in recent weeks by the Syrian regime against civilians in eastern Ghouta and in residential areas of Idlib province.

France reiterates that indiscriminate bombings and the use of incendiary weapons against civilians represent serious violations of international humanitarian law and could constitute war crimes or even crimes against humanity. It is vital and urgent to bring to an immediate end the bombings in Idlib and the siege in eastern Ghouta. The Astana guarantors have taken upon themselves the responsibility to supervise its implementation, and we therefore urge these States to effectively impose on the Syrian regime a complete cessation of hostilities as well as respect for the basic principles and norms of international humanitarian law and human rights law.

The second observation is particularly worrying: the deterioration of humanitarian access in recent weeks in Syria. We have reiterated this concern on numerous occasions in this Chamber: the humanitarian situation will not improve without comprehensive, unimpeded, safe and ongoing humanitarian access to the aid distributed by the United Nations and its partners.

Nonetheless, the regime is continuing to create unacceptable obstacles to the provision of humanitarian aid. The Syrian authorities have not authorized even a single inter-agency convoy in several weeks. France condemns this unacceptable attitude and reiterates its call for the safe and unhindered access of the United Nations and its humanitarian partners to civilians throughout Syrian territory. The right of the Syrian population both to humanitarian assistance and to protection must be respected unconditionally.

The Security Council cannot remain silent given these recurring violations of international humanitarian law, which require a strong response from the Council.

Finally, I would like to touch on the obvious discrepancy between the continuing violence on the ground in Syria and the diplomatic offensives, which are not facing up to the situation. We know that only an inclusive political solution that is elaborated under the auspices of the United Nations and that sets up a political transition in the context of resolution 2254 (2015) can bring a lasting and credible end to the suffering of the Syrian people.

However, the regime is continuing its policy of methodical and deliberate obstruction, as we saw during the negotiation session held in Vienna on 25 and 26 January. In this context more than ever, we need to support the United Nations and United Nations mediation in Geneva, as well as eschew any temporary solutions agreed without the opposition, which would be unrealistic as they would not meet the aspirations of all Syrians. It is up to those countries that support the regime, primarily Russia and Iran, to bring to bear the pressure necessary to ensure that the regime puts an end to this negative and irresponsible strategy. Make no mistake: there can be no negotiated political transition in Syria without a total ceasefire, humanitarian access throughout the whole of the territory and the creation of a neutral environment that would restore trust and ensure the safety of all Syrians.

How credible is a regime that is stepping up the bombing in Idlib, preventing medical evacuations in eastern Ghouta and refusing to authorize a single humanitarian convoy? How credible can diplomatic efforts be that are devoid of any specific assurances and that do not lead to any significant and lasting improvement in the humanitarian situation in Idlib and eastern Ghouta?

We reiterate that humanitarian aid is unconditional and apolitical. We therefore make an urgent request to see proof of this on the ground. That is exactly what France will seek to defend in the weeks to come, in line with the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex), namely, the establishment of a neutral environment that must include the lifting of sieges, the cessation of hostilities, prisoner exchanges and chemical disarmament, all of this under international supervision so as to ensure genuine constitutional reform and the holding of free elections. That is the only way to bring a lasting end to the suffering of the Syrian people and open the way to an inclusive political process in Syria, in the interests of all the Syrian people. It is for that reason that we will continue to fully support the process stemming from resolution 2254 (2015), and we will make every effort to unite the Council in this respect.

Mrs. Gregoire Van Haaren (Netherlands): The Kingdom of the Netherlands wishes to thank Assistant Secretary-General Ursula Mueller for her briefing.

Seven years after the start of the conflict in Syria, the humanitarian situation in the country continues to be a truly heartbreaking drama. While several parties to the conflict are responsible for a wide array of violations of international humanitarian law, it is especially painful to see the horrifying effects of the military actions taken by the Syrian authorities.

Instead of protecting their own citizens, the Syrian authorities are bombing them. Instead of providing basic services to their people, the authorities are destroying hospitals and schools. Instead of allowing humanitarian aid into the most affected areas, the authorities are starving some of their own people.

The outlook for 2018 remains grim, with a worsening humanitarian situation and a continuation of the battle for influence by regional Powers. Allow me to focus on three important aspects: the current situation on the ground, cross-border aid delivery and the implementation of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs' (OCHA) five asks.

On the situation on the ground, the international community has been providing funding for a principled humanitarian response. The Kingdom of the Netherlands has provided amply to the United Nations and to international non-governmental organizations in order to provide relief for the suffering of the Syrian people. But this relief is hardly reaching those in need.

In besieged eastern Ghouta, we are witnessing the use of starvation as a method of warfare. Not a single aid convoy has reached the 400,000 people trapped there in the last three months. Where have we seen this before? In Idlib, because of the continuous intensified aerial bombardments, aid to more than 250,000 internally displaced persons is extremely difficult to deliver.

Improvised explosive devices in Raqqa and elsewhere in Syria have caused large numbers of casualties. The Netherlands urges all Council members to continue their contributions to make all of Syria free of mines and explosive devices.

Concerning cross-border aid delivery, it is equally disturbing that today, one month after the Council renewed the authorization of cross-border aid, some of these very aid convoys cannot cross the border because of the security situation. The consequences of this lack of cross-border aid for the large number of displaced people in north-west Syria are tremendous. There is an urgent need to ensure that all convoys can have safe passage to reach those in need, both in Afrin and beyond.

In Afrin, the intensification of the military operation there last Sunday has led to more displaced families that have nowhere to go. We call upon all parties to protect civilians, to facilitate humanitarian access and to allow for the safe passage of all people who wish to leave areas under attack.

Turning to the implementation of OCHA's five asks, the recent visit by Mark Lowcock to Syria was in itself a positive step, but it is imperative that the dialogue on aid delivery yield effective results as soon as possible. In effect, the requests made by the Emergency Relief Coordinator do not differ much from those of his predecessors, effectively highlighting the lack of progress in terms of sustained, principled humanitarian access to those most in need.

The message of the humanitarian and international community has been consistent: respect your obligations under international humanitarian law, protect your own citizens — including health workers and humanitarian aid workers — and allow for rapid, safe and sustained humanitarian access.

In conclusion, it is crucial that the Security Council unequivocally unite itself behind the concrete and attainable five asks of OCHA. It remains essential to see progress on the rapid, effective and principled implementation in the coming weeks of all five asks of OCHA. We call on Council members to consider steps to be taken collectively in case no progress takes place and on those who have influence on the Syrian authorities to make sure that humanitarian aid reaches those most in need. Let us not forget that lives are at stake.

Mr. Miller (United States of America): The Security Council met only last week (see S/PV.8164) and heard the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs describe his visit to Syria and reiterate a series of requests that, in his estimation, would be a positive step towards improving the humanitarian situation in Syria.

Sadly, not only has none of those requests been approved by the Syrian regime, but also the situation in places such as eastern Ghouta continues to deteriorate beyond our worst imagination. To the surprise of no one, cross-line deliveries in Syria, particularly to besieged and hard-to-reach areas, remain stalled. In

fact, there have been no United Nations inter-agency convoys anywhere for more than six weeks and no convoys to a besieged area for more than eight weeks.

We deplore what are, frankly, starve-and-siege tactics, preventing the distribution of aid, which must be needs-based. As a result, many families are going without the most basic food, medicine and other supplies required for survival. Hospitals reuse syringes and other medical items meant for single use and, during the coldest months of winter, families who have run out of fuel and cooking oil burn household items to stay warm. That is happening in Ghouta and elsewhere throughout Syria.

We need an immediate, unconditional humanitarian pause in eastern Ghouta, where the impact of air strikes and artillery shelling on the civilian infrastruture has forced the closure of more schools and medical clinics. Those bombings continued over the weekend, further proving that any supposed ceasefire in the area was merely aspirational.

We reiterate the need to evacuate hundreds of critically ill people trapped in eastern Ghouta. We have seen no movement on that issue since late December, and the list continues to grow. Only a few weeks ago, we heard that the medical evacuation list contained 600 names, including hundreds of children. That list has now grown to at least 750 people, according to the United Nations staff on the ground.

Over the weekend, the United Nations reported that another critically ill person on Ghouta's medical evacuation list died due to the lack of medical treatment. Such deaths are senseless and reflect the Syrian regime's depraved disregard for human life. Such gratuitous cruelty suggests that the regime's siege of eastern Ghouta is directed not at the armed opposition but against the civilian population. We need not remind the members of the Council that a siege directed against civilians is a violation of international humanitarian law.

We also appreciate the fact that Sweden and Kuwait worked on a draft presidential statement to address such dire humanitarian challenges. The overwhelming majority of Council members agree that we must be clear in demanding that the Syrian authorities allow immediate medical evacuations and cross-line assistance. When there are hundreds of thousands of Syrians besieged by the regime and starving due to the regime's actions, such demands are the very least that the Council can make.

We would also like to take a moment to thank the Government of Jordan for facilitating an extraordinary delivery of humanitarian assistance in mid-January to the internally displaced populations stranded at Rukban. That population now has food and relief items for one month. However, we continue to wait for the Syrian regime's formal approval for the United Nations to begin cross-line aid deliveries to that vulnerable population from Damascus. The United Nations submitted its proposal in mid-November and has still receievd no response. All arrangements have been made for the deliveries to begin as soon as possible. The Syrian regime has only to grant its approval and to stand out of the way for life-saving assistance to reach those in need.

As we heard earlier today, members of the Security Council visited the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C., yesterday and saw the exhibition about the Syrian regime's arbitrary detention and torture of more than 100,000 civilians. The name of the exhibition is "Please Don't Forget Us". We should bear that, and what the Syrian regime is capable of doing, in mind as we discuss yet again what is taking place in easter Ghouta and elsewhere in Syria.

Mr. Llorentty Solíz (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): My delegation wishes to thank Ms. Ursula Mueller, Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, for her briefing.

Bolivia regrets the crisis in Syria, which, after all these years, has caused so much destruction and the loss of so many lives. Ms. Mueller told us that, since the beginning of the conflict, more than 500,000 people have died; currently, there are 13.1 million people who need humanitarian assistance, 2.9 million of whom are trapped in besieged and hard-to-reach areas; and at least 6.1 million people have been internally displaced.

We believe that the most recent events have resulted in an increase in the number of dead, of people who need humanitarian assistance and of internally displaced persons. We call for the cleaning and demining of and access for basic humanitarian assistance to the city of Raqqa to take place as soon as possible to allow for the safe and dignified return of those families who were displaced due to the conflict. We regret that, since the month of October 2017, approximately 220 people have died and others have been injured in blasts.

The recent events in Syria show once again the urgent need to revitalize the Geneva political process, reinforcing the tangible results of the Astana meeting, in consultation, of course, with all the parties involved, including the opposition, in order to facilitate the development of mutual confidence-building measures and, as a result, the improvement of the political and humanitarian situation. We are certain that this will also allow for the release of detainees and hostages and the search for the disappeared, as well as for the establishment of conditions for a political process and a sustained and lasting ceasefire.

We express our support for the efforts made recently in Vienna and for the work to take place in Sochi. We welcome the decision of the Secretary-General to allow his representative to participate in those events.

We once again remind the parties to the conflict that they must allow unconditional access for humanitarian assistance, ensuring and safeguarding the security and physical integrity of humanitarian workers, in particular in the besieged and hard-to-reach areas. In that regard, we reiterate once again our highest recognition for the work being done by the staff of the various humanitarian assistance agencies and bodies on the ground, and we urge the parties involved to meet their obligations under international law, in particular international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

We remind the parties involved that they must implement the Astana agreements, respect the de-escalation areas and prevent any attacks on civilian institutions, such as residential areas, schools and hospitals, in line with international humanitarian law, to ensure the protection of civilians and unimpeded access for accredited humanitarian organizations to provide the greatly needed assistance. In that regard, we underscore the work of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, which has reached 800,000 people through cross-border convoys. We hope that those operations can continue, for which better coordination and cooperation between the United Nations and the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic are recommended.

In that context, we underscore the agreements arrived at among Iran, Russia, and Turkey on 22 December 2017, and we urgently call for strengthening them so as to free detainees and abductees, as well as to positively identify missing persons. We stress the importance of the work of the Russian Centre for Reconciliation of Opposing Sides in the Syrian Arab Republic, which has become a guarantor of security and the distribution of humanitarian aid, while ensuring the evacuation of persons from areas facing armed conflict.

Lastly, it is important to point out that the humanitarian situation, which is affecting more than 13.2 million people in Syria, must be resolved exclusively through an organized, inclusive and political process based on dialogue and led for and by the Syrian people, which would allow for a peaceful solution respecting the sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence of Syria. We call on members of the Security Council to make every effort to ensure that it remain unified on such an issue as fundamental as humanitarian assistance.

Mr. Meza-Cuadra (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): We thank Ms. Ursula Mueller, Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator, for her detailed briefing.

The humanitarian landscape in Syria that she described to us this morning is, once again, disheartening. Over the past several years, the relevant reports of the Secretary-General and Security Council meetings on this issue have repeatedly related victim fatalities, the renewal of the large-scale displacement of refugees, besieged cities, an increasing spread of diseases, a high level of malnutrition, the destruction of medical infrastructure and other scourges. Given such a situation, the only remedy left is to ensure the immediate, safe and unrestricted access of humanitarian assistance and strict compliance under international humanitarian law, in particular respect for the principle of proportionality as related to conducting military attacks and taking the appropriate precautions with regard to their impact on the civilian population.

We therefore regret the persistent restrictions placed on access to humanitarian aid in various areas of Syria, in particular the tragic and untenable situation facing the people of eastern Ghouta and Idlib. We hope that the ceasefire agreement in eastern Ghouta, recently deliberated in Vienna, will have a positive secondary effect in addressing the pressing humanitarian needs of its people. We appreciate the work of the Syrian authorities and Russia that resulted in the medical evacuation of 29 people from eastern Ghouta in December 2017. At the same time, we encourage them

to intensify such efforts as there are hundreds of other people who are in need of urgent care.

Another issue that deeply concerns us pertains to demining and, in general, to the deactivation of explosive ordnance, in the light of what is happening daily in cities, such as Raqqa in which 30 to 50 victims, who fall prey to such ordnance, are recorded weekly. We see as positive the dialogue aimed at humanitarian goals between the United Nations and the Government of Syria, especially the visit to the country by Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Mark Lowcock. That dialogue and the joint statement on humanitarian mine action issued following the latest Astana meeting positively herald that more substantial progress could be made in that area. Concerning military operations in densely populated areas, such as Afrin, we call for preventing any escalation that could further exacerbate the suffering of the people and hinder achieving a political solution pursuant to resolution 2254 (2015) and the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex).

It is absolutely necessary that the Council show the world its unity and sense of commitment, and send a message that prioritizes human beings over political interests. We therefore hope that a consensus can be reached on the adoption of a text that reflects the five priorities outlined by Mr. Lowcock, which constitute the bare minimum for alleviating the human suffering of the Syrian people, and that is why Peru fully supports them.

Mr. Ndong Mba (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): In taking the floor at this meeting on the humanitarian situation of Syrian Arab Republic, I should like to begin by sincerely thanking Ms. Ursula Mueller, Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator, for her detailed briefing on the very unfortunate humanitarian situation that Syria is currently undergoing. Moreover, we listened to Under-Secretary-General Lowcock's briefing on 22 January following his visit to Syria, in which he pointed out for us five areas where improvement is needed in order to address the serious humanitarian situation, including the imperative to address the needs of some 13 million people in Syria, to facilitate medical evacuations and freedom of movement across borders, and to adopt measures so that the United Nations and international non-governmental organizations can provide effective assistance to the Syrian people.

Both Ms. Mueller and Mr. Lowcock's briefings afford us a very desolate overview that must focus the attention of the international community on making every effort necessary to alleviate the suffering of the Syrian people. The specific situation in eastern Ghouta, in which almost 94 per cent of the people are trapped, is a particularly a worrisome issue. The situation of more than 600 people in need of urgent medical care has been, and is being, exacerbated by air-strike campaigns that have led to the displacement of those in Idlib and Hama.

In addition to all this, we also point to the catastrophic humanitarian situation resulting from the ongoingOperation Olive Branch, which is leading to the substantial displacement and suffering of civilians. On the one hand, that can only elicit our deep concern, and, on the other hand, we must call for redoubling the efforts of the United Nations and the international community to find a solution to the very serious humanitarian crisis in the Syrian Arab Republic.

The President: There are no more speakers inscribed on the list of speakers. I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 11.30 a.m.

United Nations S/PV.8172

Security Council

Seventy-third year

Provisional

8172nd meeting
Wednesday, 31 January 2018, 10 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Umarov	(Kazakhstan)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Inchauste Jordán
	China	Mr. Zhang Dianbin
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Tanoh-Boutchoue
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Ndong Mba
	Ethiopia	Ms. Guadey
	France	Mr. Melki
	Kuwait	Mr. Alotaibi
	Netherlands	Mrs. Gregoire Van Haaren
	Peru	Mr. Meza-Cuadra
	Poland	Ms. Wronecka
	Russian Federation	Mr. Polyanskiy
	Sweden	Mr. Skoog
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Hickey
	United States of America	Ms. Tachco

Agenda

Reports of the Secretary-General on the Sudan and South Sudan

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the translation of speeches delivered in other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room U-0506 (verbatimrecords@un.org). Corrected records will be reissued electronically on the Official Document System of the United Nations (http://documents.un.org).

18-02650 (E)

Accessible document Please recycle

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Reports of the Secretary-General on the Sudan and South Sudan

The President: The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

The Council has before it the text of a statement by the President on behalf of the Council on the subject of today's meeting. I thank Council members for their valuable contributions to this statement. In accordance with the understanding reached among the members of the Council, I shall take it that the members of the Security Council agree to the statement, which will be issued as a document of the Security Council under the symbol S/PRST/2018/4.

The meeting rose at 10.15 a.m.

United Nations S/PV.8173

Security Council

Seventy-third year

Provisional

8173rd meeting

Wednesday, 31 January 2018, 10.15 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Umarov	(Kazakhstan)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Llorentty Soliz
	China	Mr. Zhang Dianbin
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Tanoh-Boutchoue
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Ndong Mba
	Ethiopia	Ms. Guadey
	France	Mr. Melki
	Kuwait	Mr. Alotaibi
	Netherlands	Mrs. Gregoire Van Haaren
	Peru	Mr. Meza-Cuadra
	Poland	Ms. Wronecka
	Russian Federation	Mr. Polyanskiy
	Sweden	Mr. Skoog
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Hickey
	United States of America	Ms. Tachco

Agenda

Implementation of the note by the President of the Security Council (S/2017/507)

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the translation of speeches delivered in other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room U-0506 (verbatimrecords@un.org). Corrected records will be reissued electronically on the Official Document System of the United Nations (http://documents.un.org).

18-02656 (E)

Accessible document Please recycle

The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Implementation of the note by the President of the Security Council (S/2017/507)

The President: The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of Kazakhstan.

During our presidency, Kazakhstan arranged its programme of work to address the ongoing and new emerging threats of the twenty-first century. We built upon Secretary-General Guterres' new agenda for peace, in synergy with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and today's realities.

As this has been the first time that Central Asia was represented on the Security Council in the history of the United Nations, we strove to balance the Council's global agenda with priorities in the region. Through multilateralism and a comprehensive approach for conflict prevention, we have alerted the Council to some impending challenges. Based on openness, neutrality and inclusivity, we have aspired to give the Council new dynamism with visions and forward momentum that eventually could become lasting legacies.

In addition to political diplomacy and mediation, a three-fold multidimensional strategy was put forward by Kazakhstan to promote and strengthen a security and development link, a regional approach to tackling transnational threats faced by countries in conflict, and streamlining the effectiveness of the Organization's system in delivering as one United Nations. Implemented in Central Asia, it can serve as a model for other regions, as well.

Kazakhstan has always endeavoured to enhance the unity and collective ownership of the Council. Our term began with a solemn flag raising ceremony that we introduced for the first time to pay tribute to newly-elected members and symbolize the trust placed in them by Member States. It is important that we agreed to make that innovation an annual practice at the beginning of every new term of the Council. We have also worked on behalf of all Member States, with a majority of 20 public meetings and only 10 consultations. In addition to three signature events, we have adopted two resolutions and four presidential statements, and issued 12 press statements. In many cases, their adoption and issuance, together with authorized media events, were critical to project the Council's support and unity, which was much needed, for those struggling in conflict zones to implement peace agreements. They also helped to enhance transparency, agree upon outcomes and define a road map for the future. I shall now briefly describe our signature events.

At the high-level thematic briefing on 18 January (see S/PV.8160), the most pressing global problem concerning the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction was afforded a new perspective, as was the use of confidence-building measures. Presided over by President Nazarbayev of Kazakhstan, the discussions, which were attended by an unprecedented audience, gave momentum to a new paradigm for averting deliberate or accidental outbreaks of war, and conveyed my country's honour and respect for the United Nations. As has been stated by my Head of State, it is crucial to enjoy political will and build confidence among leaders to achieve a stable and secure world. Kazakhstan will continue its efforts to build trust among nations during its term on the Council. The same day, the Council adopted a milestone presidential statement (S/PRST/2018/1) as a blueprint for regional preventive diplomacy, which aims at achieving a world free of violent conflicts by the United Nations centenary in 2045.

The ministerial debate of 19 January, on building regional partnership in Afghanistan and Central Asia as a model to link security and development (see S/PV.8162), was presided over by His Excellency Mr. Mr. Kairat Abdrakhmanov, and included the participation of several visiting Ministers. Council members and 16 other delegations focused on investments in connectivity, trade and infrastructure so as to strengthen the security of the region. Kazakhstan's vision for the link connecting security and development could be realized through the integration of Afghanistan into the region with all its human capital and promise. Presidential statement S/PRST/2018/2, which was adopted before the debate, calls for enhanced regional, interregional and international cooperation to promote long-term peace, stability and sustainable development, as well as to combat terrorism, violence and drug trafficking.

One of the highlights of our presidency was the Security Council mission to Afghanistan from 12 to 15 January, which aimed at gaining first-hand information concerning threats facing the country and

its potential. That visit was the first made since 2010, and provided a unique opportunity to meet President Ghani, Chief Executive Abdullah and a total of 120 representatives of the Afghan Government, the business sector, civil society, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan and the NATO Resolute Support Mission. The Council was able to demonstrate its support for the country and its commitment to peace and reconciliation. It also reinforced the importance of holding parliamentary and presidential elections in 2018 and 2019, respectively. The premise of our approach concerning the linkage connecting security, development, a regional approach and an effective United Nations has been fully recognized by the Afghan leadership.

On 29 January, at the initiative of Nikki Haley, Council members visited Washington, D.C., to meet with the United States leadership and exchange views with President Trump on the Council's agenda, including counter-terrorism.

The significance of regional preventive diplomacy was prominently brought to the fore at the briefing provided by Special Representative of the Secretary-General Natalia Gherman, Head of the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia (UNRCCA), and Special Representative of the Secretary-General Mohammed ibn Chambas, Head of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS). It was the first time in three years that a Security Council press statement (SC/13179) was issued concerning UNRCCA in support for the Centre, which celebrated its tenth anniversary in December 2017.

Meetings on various United Nations peacekeeping operations reviewed the work of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the United Nations Mission in Colombia, the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur, UNOWAS, the United Nations Support Mission in Libya, the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus, the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia and the United Nations Mission in South Sudan, and analysed the readiness of their operations, while considering needed restructuring to address the political, security, humanitarian, human rights and development dimensions.

We take note that regional organizations and forums — such as the African Union, the European Union, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development, the African Union, the Economic Community of West African States and the Group of Five for the Sahel — are crucial to reaching early and long-lasting solutions to conflicts in Africa. Intense deliberations concerning the Middle East made it clear that political will, confidence-building and trust are indispensable to bring all parties to the conflict to the negotiating table to bring about peace.

Dialogues with New York-based civil society representatives as our partners proved helpful. Inviting women activists gave on-the-ground insights and strengthened the women/youth and peace and security agenda as a prerequisite for stability and progress.

Although it does not fall under the programme of work of the Council, the landmark high-level special event surrounding the presentation by our Foreign Minister of a draft code of conduct towards achieving a world free of terrorism, which was held on 18 January and included more than 100 participants, was nevertheless very relevant to its work. The document will be further elaborated to serve as a platform to bring Member States together to honour their commitments to the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy and other instruments.

We now close with this formal wrap-up session as a tool to assess the Council's response and relevance to address issues and improve its working methods. No endeavour is accomplished alone.

Unity is important. Our presidency was marked by a convergence of ideas, a spirit of compromise and readiness to seek common ground. As today's meeting is the last official one of our presidency, on behalf of my Government and my delegation, I express our warmest appreciation to all Council members and States Members of the United Nations for their whole-hearted solidarity with us. I also thank the Council's secretariat, the Executive Office of the Secretary-General, the Department of Political Affairs, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Department of Safety and Security for their ongoing expert guidance at every stage.

In addition, we thank all branches of the Secretariat, and in particular the team of excellent interpreters for standing shoulder to shoulder with us. Alhough our presidency is ending, it only heightens our

resolve to move forward with greater commitment and determination. It is with great pleasure that I now hand over the stewardship of the Council to Kuwait. I wish the Kuwait delegation every success next month, and I assure it of our full support.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I shall now give the floor to those other members of the Council who wish to make statements.

Ms. Guadey (Ethiopia): First of all, I would like to congratulate you, Sir, and your team on the successful completion of your presidency. This month we welcomed the six newly elected members of the Security Council, and the important initiative that you took to organize a flag installation ceremony for the first time is very much welcomed and appreciated. We hope the ceremony will be maintained as a tradition in the years to come.

Substantively speaking, January has indeed been a very busy month and a great deal has been accomplished. The effort you, Sir, made in bringing the issue of Afghanistan and the Central Asia region to the fore is commendable. We also welcome the adoption of the press statement on the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia (SC/13179) for the first time in some time. The visit to Kabul afforded Council members an opportunity to have a better appreciation of the situation in Afghanistan. The high-level briefing on non-proliferation (see S/PV.8160) also allowed us to have an exchange of views on practical confidence-building measures to de-escalate growing tensions and preserve the international non-proliferation regime.

Today I speak on behalf of three African members of the Council, and I would like to highlight the discussion we had over the past month, in particular with regard to issues of peace and security in Africa.

On 9 January the Security Council discussed the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (see S/PV.8153). One year after the signing of the Comprehensive and Inclusive Political Agreement of 31 December 2016, the deep divisions that remain on its implementation and the tense political atmosphere that prevails in the country are a source of concern. The deteriorating security and humanitarian situation is also worrisome. There was broad consensus among Council members on the importance of accelerating the full implementation of the 31 December agreement, which remains the only viable framework for resolving the current political impasse and for doing everything possible to ensure that the elections scheduled for 23 December take place in a free, fair, peaceful and credible manner.

The critical importance of enhanced coordination among the United Nations, the African Union, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, the Southern African Development Community and other partners in supporting the implementation of the 31 December agreement and the electoral process was underscored. That and other relevant points are covered in the press statement issued by the Council on 16 in January (SC/13163), which sent a clear message to the Congolese parties to reject violence and address their differences peacefully. Resolving problems of violence in eastern and central Democratic Republic of the Congo, ensuring the rule of law and accountability were identified as priorities to facilitate the necessary conditions for the conduct of the elections.

On 10 January, the Council received a briefing on the situation in Darfur and the activities of the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID) (see S/PV.8155). It was noted that the security situation in Darfur continues to show marked progress and that the Government is consolidating State authority across Darfur. The weapons-collection programme launched by the Government is also said to have consolidated the prevailing relative peace and stability in Darfur. However, concern was expressed about the lack of progress in the peace process. With regard to UNAMID, the assessment report presented by the Chairperson of the African Union Commission and the Secretary-General on phase one of the reconfiguration of the mission (S/2018/12) was discussed. We welcome the presidential statement (S/PRST/2018/4) adopted this morning, which reflects the consensus of the Council on the situation in Darfur and the reconfiguration of UNAMID.

On 11 January, the Security Council received a briefing on the six-month report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) (see S/PV.8156). The briefing allowed the Council to reflect on the political, peace and security situation and the humanitarian situation in West Africa and the Sahel. The presidential statement adopted yesterday (S/PRST/2018/3) reflects the salient points raised during the Council's discussions and

its recognition of the role of UNOWAS in supporting efforts by national and local actors to sustain peace.

The Security Council discussed the situation in Libya on 17 January (see S/PV.8159). Council members reiterated their support for the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Support Mission in Libya and his work to facilitate the implementation of the United Nations action plan. It was acknowledged that the road ahead would not be easy. The importance of further galvanizing the support of the Libyans themselves and of the international community to bring about a Libyan-led political solution, under the auspices of the United Nations, was very much underscored.

On 23 January the Council received a briefing on the situation in Mali and the activities of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (see S/PV.8163). It was an opportunity for the Council to welcome the renewed commitment of the Malian parties to the expeditious implementation of all of their remaining obligations under the Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in Mali by the end of March, through the adoption of a revised timetable. However, serious concern was expressed about persistent delays in the full implementation of key provisions of the Agreement. Council members underscored the urgent need to deliver tangible and visible peace dividends to the population in the north and other parts of Mali in order to preserve the relevance of the agreement and prevent the reversal of the gains achieved thus far. They expressed their intention to follow the situation closely and to respond with appropriate steps within the framework of resolution 2374 (2017), should the parties not implement the commitments made in accordance with the new timetable. We hope the press statement issued by the Council on 24 January (SC/13177) will send the right message to the parties in that regard.

On 24 January the members of the Security Council deliberated on the situation in Somalia (see S/PV.8165). While progress on the political, security and economic reforms was welcomed, the importance of making progress on key issues in 2018, including on the constitutional review, elections, fiscal federalism and power- and resource-sharing, was underscored. However, concern was raised about the ongoing instability in Somalia, and Council members urged all parties to resolve political differences through peaceful dialogue.

With regard to the conditions-based transition plan, the Council reaffirmed the importance of accelerating the implementation of the national security architecture while focusing on the gradual transfer of lead security responsibility from the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) to the Somali Government. In that regard, members underlined the importance of close consultation among the Federal Government, the federal member states, the African Union and the troop-contributing countries, the United Nations and international partners to ensure a coordinated approach to implementing conditions-based planning and financing. The joint efforts by the United Nations and the African Union to explore options for financing AMISOM was also noted.

Last but not least, the Council received a briefing on the situation in South Sudan (see S/PV.8166). The security situation in South Sudan remains fragile, and the dire humanitarian situation continues to be of serious concern. The signing of the Agreement on the Cessation of Hostilities, Protection of Civilians and Humanitarian Access was welcomed, but its violation by the parties is dimming prospects for progress in ending the conflict. The members of the Council stressed that all violations must be investigated and that those responsible held accountable. In that regard, the role of the Ceasefire and Transitional Security Arrangements Monitoring Mechanism in verifying those violations was appreciated. Maintaining the unity of the Council, as expressed in its latest presidential statement (S/PRST/2018/4) in urging the parties to participate in the High-level Revitalization Forum of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and live up to the commitments they made, was underscored.

On the margins of the thirtieth African Union (AU) Summit, a series of meetings were held in Addis Ababa, including the meeting of the leaders of the United Nations, AU and IGAD as part of maintaining unity of purpose among the three organizations in the search for lasting peace, security and stability in South Sudan. The hope and expectation is that it would provide renewed impetus to the second phase of the High-level Revitalization Forum, which is scheduled to start early next month. We look forward to receiving a briefing from the Secretary-General on that and other related issues under the incoming presidency of the Kingdom of Kuwait, to which we wish the best of luck and success.

Ms. Tachco (United States of America): I offer many congratulations to Kazakhstan on its able leadership of the Council for the month of January. It has been a busy and productive month for the Security Council. Thanks to Kazakhstan's sustained efforts, the Security Council travelled on its first mission to Afghanistan in seven years, where it met with leaders of the Government of National Unity, officials of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, opposition parties and civil society representatives. Council members thanked the Afghan people for their continued resolve in the fight against terrorism, and noted international consensus on the need to strengthen security. They urged President Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah to hold free, fair and transparent elections, as scheduled, and stressed the importance of maintaining unity for the sake of an inclusive and stable Afghanistan.

We welcome Kazakhstan's emphasis on promoting peace in Afghanistan, and we welcome the emphasis on the potential benefits of security and development partnerships between Afghanistan and Central Asia. We thank Kazakhstan for convening a ministerial debate on the partnership between Afghanistan and Central Asia. Afghanistan, as those present all know, is a top United States priority as well. That is why our National Security Advisor, H. R. McMaster, came to New York especially to brief the Council on Afghanistan and our South Asia strategy, which goes hand in hand with the United Nations efforts to end the conflict and help Afghans build a better future.

We were also very pleased to receive our biannual briefing on the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventative Diplomacy for Central Asia — the first by the mission's new Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Natalia Gherman. Of particular note is the fact that the Council adopted a press statement (SC/13179) supporting her work, which is the first time we have come to a consensus on such a document in several years. We hope that it will open the door for future documents in support of the mission's important work.

However, obviously South and Central Asia were not the only focus to the Council's work. This month, Ambassador Haley urged Council members to support the South Sudan arms embargo and said that we as a Council must act on the position we took in our 14 December presidential statement (S/PRST/2017/25) to impose costs and consequences on those who undermine the peace process in South Sudan.

We also held important discussions on the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus Mission and its support for a comprehensive settlement to reunify Cyprus as a bizonal, bicommunal federation. We renewed the Mission's mandate this month and now we urge Cypriot leaders to take steps to rebuild trust, improve the public atmosphere and resume talks immediately.

Council members remain unified in support of the peace process in Colombia and the work of the United Nations Verification Mission, noting that the challenges posed by the reintegration of the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia and the implementation of the historic Final Agreement for Ending the Conflict and Building a Stable and Lasting Peace are significant, and success is not certain. The Council is also committed to the resumption of talks with the Ejército de Liberación Nacional and emphasizes the importance of a new ceasefire.

The Council also reaffirmed that the Libyan Political Agreement must remain the framework for the political process throughout the country's transition period and that there is no room for spoilers. It is long past time for all parties to put the interests of the Libyan people first and engage fully with the United Nations sponsored political process. In the meantime, we must also deepen our work with the Libyan authorities to ensure that all those responsible for human rights abuses against migrants, including the shocking practice of slavery, are held accountable.

As you, Mr. President, mentioned earlier this week, Ambassador Haley hosted the members of the Security Council in Washington, D.C., to view evidence of Iran's violations of its international obligations and its interference in conflicts around the region. She also hosted Security Council members at the United States Holocaust Museum for a discussion about atrocities in Syria. The trip underscored the need for the Council to take action on both fronts and pursue accountability.

I thank you again, Mr. President, for your able management of the Council this month. We are very much looking forward to the Kuwaiti presidency of the Council in February. We are confident that Kuwait will lead us effectively in our continuing efforts.

Mr. Meza-Cuadra (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): My delegation joins in congratulating Kazakhstan on having fulfilled in earnest the responsibility of presiding over the Security Council during the month of January,

and for having done so at the highest level in its first time as a non-permanent member. We commend the Permanent Mission of Kazakhstan and its team, as well as Ambassador Umarov.

We highlight President Nursultan Nazarbayev's participation in the very timely debate (see S/PV.8160) on the need to build confidence and prevent the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and the participation of Minister Kairat Abdrakhmanov and his colleagues from Central Asia in the enriching debate on Afghanistan and the importance of regional cooperation for security and development (see S/PV.8162). In both cases, Kazakhstan made substantive contributions to international peace and security.

My delegation fully recognizes the need to take more constructive action in the prevention of conflicts at the national, regional and global levels in order to achieve sustainable peace. In that regard, we would like to share some reflections on the issues addressed by the Council in January, which has also been Peru's first month as a non-permanent member.

First, we have reaffirmed our conviction that the solution to the challenges facing the international community necessarily involves strengthening multilateralism, respecting and promoting international law, and observing the Charter of the United Nations, in particular Chapter VI on the peaceful settlement of disputes. We believe that today's world requires a multidimensional and comprehensive approach, which is the basis of sustainable peace. Sustaining peace also requires building inclusive and accountable national institutions aimed at achieving sustainable development and cooperation, as well as the active participation of women and young people. In that regard, we welcome the adoption of the presidential statement on prevention (S/PRST/2018/1), presented by the Kazakhstan delegation.

At the same time, we are of the view that it is appropriate to continue strengthening the ways in which the Council identifies, evaluates and responds to the emergence of new risks and threats. The Council must bear in mind the serious impacts of such phenomena as poverty, inequality or climate change on security, especially given that the United Nations system has the capacity to take action to such ends through a more coordinated and coherent approach of its three pillars.

Secondly, we welcome the broad consensus in the Council on many principles, perspectives and objectives, and we emphasize the need to maintain its unity. Without prejudice to the interests and differences that normally exist among its members, we believe that the unity of the Council leads to the firm commitments and concrete actions required to promote international peace and security. One example of that is the Council's unity in its support for the peace process in Colombia. We highlight, among the agenda items that we have considered this month, the efforts of that country to achieve sustainable peace with the support of the international community. We also note the unity of the Council in support of the peace process in Afghanistan. We thank the presidency and the Secretariat for the successful organization of the mission to that country, and thank the Afghan authorities for their favourable response. My country has strongly condemned the recent terrorist attacks and expressed its solidarity with the Afghan people and Government. We hope that those responsible will be punished.

This month, we have also recognized the important work of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel and the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia in the fight against complex threats, such as terrorism and organized crime.

We also agree on the fundamental objective of achieving the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula. We are cooperating in the follow-up of various processes included in the January agenda, inter alia, those of Liberia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Libya, Mali, Somalia, South Sudan and Darfur. We must nevertheless say that, in many cases, there is much more that can and should be done. We are particularly concerned, among the issues considered this month, by the difficulties in reaching a commitment regarding the non-impunity of the use of chemical weapons in Syria and the lack of dialogue on the question of Palestine.

Thirdly, I would like to briefly refer to the work of the two subsidiary bodies over which Peru was in charge in January. The Counter-Terrorism Committee began the discussion on the annual programme and drew up the itinerary of visits and meetings throughout 2018. We are seeking long-term collaboration with the Office of Counter-Terrorism and the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate, including in the framework of the June meeting of relevant national authorities. The Committee established pursuant to resolution 2140 (2014) also initiated the process of considering the recommendations made by the Panel of

Experts following the issuing of a substantive report that will be discussed during the Kuwaiti presidency in February.

In conclusion, I reiterate our congratulations to you, Mr. President, and your team for your exemplary work this month and we welcome the Kuwaiti delegation, which will assume the presidency tomorrow.

Mr. Skoog (Sweden): Let me start by joining other Security Council members in paying tribute to you and your team, Mr. President, for your excellent stewardship of the Council during the month of January. As the first country from Central Asia to preside over the Council, we commend the focus on regional approaches to conflict prevention that you have brought to our work. Stronger regional cooperation can not only help overcome common challenges, but also creates the conditions for mutually beneficial opportunities. Each country is better off if their neighbours also prosper. That point was clearly demonstrated during the open debate on 19 January, when we discussed regional partnership in Afghanistan and Central Asia as a model for linking security and development. The presidential statement (S/PRST/2018/2) adopted following that debate is an important legacy of your presidency. I would also add my deep appreciation for our joint trip to Kabul and for the way you and your team managed that visit.

Regarding regional approaches, for our part, we were pleased to collaborate with Côte d'Ivoire, with constructive engagement from all Council members, on the presidential statement on the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS), which was adopted yesterday (S/PRST/2018/3). A regional approach to conflict prevention, early warning and response mechanisms have proven increasingly relevant as challenges related to climate change, trafficking and terrorism do not respect borders. UNOWAS is a model for other regions.

Sweden has long been a champion of disarmament and the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. The briefing on non-proliferation and, in particular, the important role of confidence building measures, was very welcome and timely. The Council has an important role to play in advancing these issues, as well as standing united to ensure that those who violate international norms are held to account. The Council needs to move forward in this effort.

In the area of non-proliferation, Sweden, together with Poland, requested an update from the Secretariat under other business following the 9 January intra-Korean talks, the first in two years. The Council members welcomed the developments, reiterated its call for full implementation of sanctions against North Korea and echoed the Secretary-General's call for denuclearization. The meeting was important, as it also showed the Council's commitment to and support for a peaceful solution to the tense situation on the Korean peninsula.

Turning to the situation in Syria, we are alarmed by what we heard only yesterday (see S/PV.8171) — the continued severity of the devastating humanitarian situation in Syria, the unacceptable levels of violence, and that urgent humanitarian assistance, including medical assistance, is required by more than 13 million people. As penholders, together with Kuwait, we are resolved to do what we can to support the United Nations and the humanitarian actors on the ground to help the millions in desperate need. During his briefing to the Council on 22 January, Emergency Relief Coordinator Mark Lowcock outlined five actions needed for sustained and improved humanitarian assistance, particularly to besieged and hard-to-reach areas. These are concrete, tangible and realistic, and we strongly support them. It is imperative that the Council stand united behind the efforts of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in that regard.

Let me say a few words regarding working methods. We applaud your efforts, Sir, to ensure that the Council was able communicate clear messages after most closed consultations during the month. That not only increases transparency, but also helps the Council to summarize the most salient points of discussions and to think about how to best address the issues further. We look forward to working with Kuwait on continuing efforts to make the work of the Council more results-oriented, transparent and inclusive. The open debate next week on working methods is welcome in that connection. Many of the tools needed to make the Council more effective are already there; however, they must be used appropriately. That includes ensuring that meetings are tailored in terms of format and focus to ensure the best chance of a meaningful outcome from the Council's deliberations.

Finally, Mr. President, experience over the past year shows that non-traditional briefers from civil society, notably women, have often animated our discussions

by adding perspectives that we would otherwise not necessarily think about. We appreciate the fact that a woman civil society organization briefer was added to the United Nations Support Mission in Libya meeting on 17 January (see S/PV.8159). Ensuring women's full participation in sustaining peace is a Swedish priority. In Libya, it is essential that women be able to participate at every step in the implementation of the action plan. We strongly believe that the Council will find that our efforts are generally more effective if we allow that to happen across the board.

Mr. Melki (France) (*spoke in French*): As a very dense month comes to a close, I wish to commend the dedication, determination and effectiveness that you have shown, Mr. President. The work that has been accomplished over the course of the month is a testament to the commitment of Kazakhstan to the role of the Security Council and, more broadly, to the United Nations system and multilateralism. The track record is particularly positive in the domains of disarmament and non-proliferation, the maintenance of peace and regional cooperation in Central Asia, naturally, but also in West Africa, as evidenced by the meeting on 11 January (see S/PV.8156) and the adoption of the presidential statement on 30 January (S/PRST/2018/3).

Instead of delving into a programme too vast to be described in detail in this statement, I will limit myself to speaking about four priority elements for France.

First of all, January was an important month for addressing the African dossier in the Security Council. We held an important meeting on the Democratic Republic of the Congo on 9 January (see S/PV.8153). As the country enters an electoral year that will be vital to its future and the stability of the entire region, it will occupy the attention of the Council until 23 December. It has been important for the Council to express its expectations since the beginning of the year. The adoption of the press statement of 18 January (S/PRST/2018/1), for which I thank the Kazakh presidency, was an opportunity to show that attention and to recall the principles championed by the Security Council — the full implementation of the Saint-Sylvestre agreement of measures to ease tensions, the respect for the electoral timetable and the participation of all in the electoral process in an environment of peace and of respect for fundamental rights.

On the humanitarian front, the statement was an opportunity for the Council to appeal to the partners of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to increase their financial aid to the country and to help it overcome the current humanitarian crisis, which is dire.

On a separate African topic, the meeting on the situation in Mali of 23 January (see S/PV.8163), allowed us to send a strong and unanimous message to the parties in Mali on the impatience of the Council with regard to the full implementation of the peace agreement. In that regard, the press statement that was issued on 24 January (see SC/13177), welcomes the renewed commitment of Malian parties to implement their respective obligations by the end of March, while indicating that if they do not, the new stages will be reviewed in the framework of the sanctions regime.

On the Malian peace process, without which there can be no peace in the Sahel, we must urgently make progress. France thanks Kazakhstan for having given the Council the opportunity to reaffirm that message.

Finally, we welcome the unanimous adoption yesterday of resolution 2399 (2018), renewing the sanctions regime on the Central African Republic until 31 January 2019. After the adoption of resolution 2387 (2017) on 5 November, which renewed the mandate of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic, resolution 2399 (2018) is a new indication of the Council's attention to the situation in the Central African Republic.

The sanctions that we have just extended are not useful in and of themselves, but rather as a means to contribute to the stabilization of and the return of lasting peace to the Central African Republic. Armed groups indeed continue to have a presence on a great majority of the territory and continue to receive supplies, thanks to the illicit flow of arms and munitions from neighbouring countries. Maintaining the sanctions is therefore vital, but the mechanism will continue to be accompanied by necessary exemption procedures in order to allow the defence and security forces in the Central African Republic to be trained, equipped and armed. Resolution 2399 (2018) introduces two new elements that seem particularly important. It will allow us to sanction individuals who incite violence when their actions are likely to jeopardize the peace, stability and security of the Central African Republic, and to punish individuals who attack humanitarian workers.

The second priority as set out by the Kazakh presidency was Afghanistan and Central Asia, which

were the focus of the Council during January, as was stated earlier. The Council's visit to Kabul made it possible to reaffirm the international community's support for Afghanistan in a very fragile security context and take steps with respect to the elections and the peace process. The ministerial-level debate of 19 January (see S/PV.8162) on the links between development and security in Afghanistan and Central Asia was an opportunity to adopt the first Security Council presidential statement (S/PRST/2018/2) on the relationship between Afghanistan and Central Asia. Finally, the consultations held by the Council on 22 January on the activities of the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia led to the adoption, for the first time since January 2015, of a press statement reiterating the Council's support for the Centre (SC/13179).

The series of appalling attacks that recently struck Afghanistan make it clear that, regrettably, the country and the region as a whole require more than ever the attention of the Security Council.

Thirdly, another priority of the Kazakh presidency was reflected in the meeting held on 18 January at the initiative of and with the presence of the President of Kazakhstan (see S/PV.8160), which made it possible to address the issue of the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. This is an absolute priority for France as well. We are aware of the fact that the threats facing the non-proliferation regime are more significant than ever and that the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and the threat of their use by States or terrorist groups are proven dangers.

In North Korea and Syria, non-proliferation norms, which lie at the very heart of our collective security, are being regularly and often blatantly flouted. The rapid development of North Korea's nuclear and ballistic programmes remains for us a grave source of concern. The same is true of the ongoing use of chemical weapons in Syria.

This leads me to my last point: the crises in North Africa and the Middle East. We participated in an important meeting on Libya (see S/PV.8159) and in the quarterly open debate on the Middle East (see S/PV.8167). We had a number of opportunities to address the situation in Syria, especially the humanitarian aspect thereof. We also met to discuss various aspects of the humanitarian situation on 9 January, allowing us to touch on the situation in Raqqa, where mines and unexploded ordnance have killed more than 200 people since last October. It was also an opportunity for most of us to more strongly underscore the gravity of the humanitarian situation in Syria, in particular in eastern Ghouta and Idlib.

A second meeting on various items was held on 22 January to enable Mark Lowcock to brief the Security Council on his first visit to Syria and to make priority recommendations. Jeffrey Feltman briefed us on the most recent developments in northern Syria, and we took that opportunity to reiterate our grave concerns about the deterioration of the humanitarian situation in Syria. Two of those concerns were pre-eminent in our discussions: the situation of the population in eastern Ghouta, besieged by the Syrian regime, which is deliberately and systematically blocking humanitarian convoys and continues to refuse to authorize hundreds of urgent medical evacuations; and the resumption of attacks on civilians and medical infrastructure. Bombings have killed dozens of civilians in the "de-escalation zones", including in Idlib, where they also led to mass displacements.

Finally, we met yesterday for the monthly briefing (see S/PV.8171) and humanitarian consultations on Syria. The near-consensual views on the urgent humanitarian situation expressed on those occasions makes it vital that the Council issue a strong pronouncement. This would help to underscore the Council's concern with regard to the exacerbation of the situation of besieged civilians in eastern Ghouta and the failure to carry out urgently needed medical evacuations, the intensified bombings in the Idlib region, and the repeated attacks on hospitals and health-care workers.

The issues I have just touched on reflect the diversity and importance of our exchanges of views in the past month. Mr. President, I wish to thank you once again.

Ms. Gregoire Van Haaren (Netherlands): Let me first thank Kazakhstan for a very successful presidency.

January 2018 has been our first month on the Security Council, as part of our split term with Italy. I welcome this opportunity to reflect on what we, as a Council, have accomplished and also where we have made too little progress, or none at all.

Let me consider three issues in this regard: concerning Afghanistan, the prevention of conflict by

addressing root causes; peacekeeping operations that are fit for purpose; and accountability and justice.

On the issue of Afghanistan and prevention, Afghanistan and the Central Asian region have been at the heart of your programme, Mr. President, and the need for the Council's continued support of Afghanistan is evident. Just this past week, the Council issued three statements on the terrorist attacks there (SC/13172, SC/13180 and SC/13185). More than 100 people, mostly civilians, lost their lives. Those heinous attacks only strengthen our resolve to stand with the Afghan people.

Only an inclusive peace and reconciliation process — one that is Afghan-led and Afghan-owned — can guarantee true stability in Afghanistan, and it is paramount that all countries in the region take up their responsibility by actively contributing to that goal.

In this context, the high-level debate held on January 19 (see S/PV.8162) provided a valuable opportunity for discussion, as did the valuable visit of the Council to Afghanistan. Members of the Council emphasized the need for inclusive regional development as an important factor in preventing conflict and sustaining peace in Afghanistan.

Conflict prevention and attention to root causes were also addressed in the work of the Council. The presidential statement on the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel that the Council adopted just yesterday (S/PRST/2018/3) refers to the role of women in prevention and recognizes the adverse effects of climate change and drought on the stability of West Africa and the Sahel.

On peacekeeping, last December 15 United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) peacekeepers were killed in North Kivu. Last Saturday, another peacekeeper was killed in South Kivu province. Violence against United Nations peacekeepers is unacceptable and needs to stop. The people who are supposed to protect others are being themselves mercilessly targeted and killed. On 22 January, Lieutenant-General Cruz published a report that had been requested by the Secretary-General. In the report, Mr. Cruz presents clear recommendations on how to change the way in which the United Nations operates in high-risk peacekeeping operations. Previous reports have included similar recommendations. Missions must be better prepared and more proactive in implementing their mandate and protecting civilians. MONUSCO is one of the missions that operates in an environment where there is barely any peace to keep and where the notion of the primacy of a viable political process is almost absent.

In our discussions this month on the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali and the United Nations Mission in South Sudan, we addressed similar serious challenges. The credibility of the Council depends partly on our ability to design and guide effective peacekeeping operations. That is why the Kingdom of the Netherlands is planning to organize an open debate on peacekeeping in March.

On accountability and justice, this month we heard reports of the renewed use of chemical weapons in Syria resulting in the killing of more than 20 civilians in eastern Ghouta. In addition, the indiscriminate bombardment of civilian-populated areas in Syria continues, as does the starvation of civilians as a method of warfare, through the blocking of desperately needed humanitarian aid, including food aid. What has become of the hard-won gains in international humanitarian law in the last century? The lack of compliance with the Geneva Conventions by parties to the Syrian conflict erode not only the very norms enshrined in these Conventions, but also the rules-based international order. We cannot let that happen.

In 2015, the Council took decisive and credible action to uphold accountability when it established the United Nations Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism (see S/PV.7501). It had a strong mandate to investigate and identify perpetrators independently from the politics in the Council. It established the use of chemical weapons in Syria by both the Syrian authorities and Da'esh. We have now considered a draft resolution to establish a new mechanism, as presented by the Russian Federation last week. The fundamental characteristics of any accountability mechanism are the principles of impartiality and independence. They were still missing in the proposal that was presented. A new mechanism should at least have the mandate to conduct research and identify perpetrators independently of the Council. The Kingdom of the Netherlands is ready to continue to work for justice and accountability for Syria and elsewhere in the world. In that regard, we welcomed the General Assembly's establishment of an accountability mechanism for the most serious crimes committed in Syria, the International, Impartial and

Independent Mechanism to assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of those Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011 (General Assembly resolution 71/248). Ultimately, the most appropriate path to accountability and justice would be a referral of the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court.

In conclusion, we thank the Kazakh presidency for its conduct of the Council's business during the month of January and appreciate its efforts to agree on press elements after most consultations as well as to encourage Council members to speak in the Chamber where possible. I would also like to take this opportunity to wish the delegation of Kuwait all the best for its presidency in February. We look forward to working with them.

Mr. Polyanskiy (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): The Security Council's agenda for the past month has been especially full. We would like to thank you personally, Mr. President, and your entire team for your very professional and effective execution of your functions in the presidency. We appreciate the relevance of Kazakhstan's initiatives, which reflect the Council's central role in seeking and developing effective solutions to very difficult problems related to the maintenance of international peace and security.

That applies particularly to the Security Council's meeting on the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (see S/PV.8160). We believe firmly that the way to put an end to the risks and threats in this area is by observing the fundamental principles of international law and ensuring equal and indivisible security conditions for every country. The current state of affairs in the area of non-proliferation and disarmament urgently needs us to collaborate in the quest for ways to deal with its growing problems while at the same time maintaining cooperation mechanisms that have been proven to be effective and respecting the interests of all States.

We greatly appreciated the holding of a ministerial-level debate on Afghanistan and Central Asia (see S/PV.8162). Kazakhstan's particular focus on the issue of Afghanistan has been backed up by Astana's responsible attitude to the quest for answers to the threats to the Central Asian region emanating from Afghanistan. The dangerous situation there, including the increasing risk of Afghanistan's northern provinces becoming a bridgehead for the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, requires an integrated approach both from the regional Powers and the international community as a whole. We assume that within the framework of initiatives designed to promote Central Asian-Afghanistan cooperation, primary consideration will be given to the positive experience of the Moscow format and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization Afghanistan Contact Group. Mutually beneficial cooperation is what is needed in Eurasia today, and external actors should promote that rather than attempting to drag the countries of the region into a zero-sum game or present them with a false choice between North and South.

We welcomed the presidential statement on Afghanistan and Central Asia (S/PRST/2018/2), aimed at strengthening peace and stability in the region. It is important that we succeeded in reaching a mutual understanding on conflict prevention in the presidential statement. However, it was also clear that discussion of this pressing issue should continue in the wider format of the General Assembly and its specialized committees. We commend the Council's very well prepared mission to Kabul during Kazakhstan's presidency. After a gap of many years since the previous such visit, it once again demonstrated the Security Council's unity on the issue of the Afghan dossier and represented an important milestone in the context of resolving the country's situation. We were pleased with the consultations on the activities of the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia, which we see as a comprehensive political tool for establishing dialogue, cooperation and a peaceful resolution of the issues among Central Asian states. It was gratifying that for the first time in three years the Council was able to agree on a press statement regarding the Centre's activities (SC/13179).

The quarterly debates on the Middle East have unfortunately confirmed the fact that the crisis trends in the region are still dominant. An episode of serious arrhythmia in the efforts to settle the Palestinian-Israeli conflict complicated the task of restarting a political dialogue. The situation in Yemen is rapidly deteriorating, while the state of affairs in Syria, Libya and Iraq remains difficult. We firmly believe that breakthroughs will be possible only through coordinated international cooperation and the establishment of a unified agenda. We must strive to unite our efforts to combat terrorism and consolidate our approaches to settling serious

regional crises. Russia is ready to participate in that work with all interested partners. Attempts to promote national agendas while ignoring the views of other Member States, which we unfortunately witnessed at the beginning of the month, are counterproductive and only make the quest for lasting solutions to the issues harder.

In the past month, with regard to a settlement of the conflict in Syria, a ninth round of negotiations was held under the auspices of the United Nations. We are pleased that there has been no pause in the recent inter-Syrian talks. In Sochi, in the past few days, with the support of the United Nations, the partners in the Astana process and the leading regional states held the Syrian National Dialogue Congress, an unprecedentedly major event hosted by Russia. The Security Council has consistently emphasized that it is the Syrians themselves who must determine their country's future, and a wide representation of every stratum of Syrian society such as this is therefore simply crucial to enabling work to begin on such urgent issues as constitution-building. In that regard, our efforts dovetail fully with the logic of resolution 2254 (2015), and we hope that they will have an appropriate follow-up.

At Russia's initiative, the Council began discussing the creation of a new international investigative mechanism to replace the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism, whose reputation is tainted. It will be important to ensure that any new entity works professionally and reliably to establish all the circumstances related to the use of poisonous substances, in strict conformity with Chemical Weapons Convention rules, in order to eventually ascertain the identity of the perpetrators of such acts.

During the discussion in January of issues in West Africa and the Sahel-Saharan region (see S/PV.8156), we concluded that the countries of the region are all dealing with similar challenges and threats that should be combated through a multifaceted approach. The United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel region is a mechanism whose potential for making progress on these issues has not been fully exploited.

The extension of the mandate of the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus for another six months was an important step, since the mission will be particularly needed during the six-month pause in the direct talks on a settlement between the island's two communities. The slight reduction in the size of its military component should in no way affect its overall effectiveness.

In conclusion, we would like to once again thank our friends from Kazakhstan and wish every success to the delegation of Kuwait, to which the baton of the presidency passes in February.

Mr. Zhang Dianbin (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China appreciates the fact that under the presidency of Kazakhstan, the Council has accomplished its work for the month of January. We congratulate Ambassador Umarov and his team on their outstanding performance.

With regard to the Council's work this month, I would like to reaffirm our positions on the following three issues.

The first issue concerns the situation in Afghanistan. Peace and stability in Afghanistan are in the interest of the long-term well-being of the Afghan people and impact their regional stability and security. The situation in Central Asia has been stable on the whole and the region has great potential for development. On 13 and 14 January, a Council delegation travelled to Afghanistan and visited Kabul. On 19 January, the Council held an open meeting at the ministerial-level on peace and security in Afghanistan and Central Asia (see S/PV.8162) and adopted presidential statement S/PRST/2018/2. All that has helped Council members understand the Afghan issue through first-hand experience, facilitated efforts by the international community to explore ways to solve the Afghan issues from a regional perspective, and promoted lasting peace and development in Afghanistan and Central Asia.

The second issue is the situation in Middle East. In January, the Council held an open meeting on Libya (see S/PV.8159) and an open debate on the question of Palestine (see S/PV.8167). More than 50 countries and organizations stated their views on the situation between Palestine and Israel and the status of Jerusalem. That has enhanced the understanding of the parties concerned about the urgency of resolving the relevant issues and sent a strong message from the international community urging the early resumption of peace talks between Palestine and Israel.

The third issue is the situation in Africa. In January, the Council discussed the situations in West Africa, the Sahel region, the Central African Republic, South Sudan, Somalia, Mali and the Democratic

Republic of the Congo and adopted relevant outcome documents. The Council has continued to focus its attention on agenda items on Africa and expresses its support to regional and subregional organizations, such as the African Union's good offices, and has supported regional countries with a view to making progress in addressing challenges. That is conducive to achieving lasting peace and stability on the African continent at an early date.

In conclusion, I wish Kuwait all the best in assuming the presidency in the month of February. China will actively support its work.

Ms. Wronecka (Poland): First of all, allow me to congratulate you personally, Mr. President, as well as your team, our colleagues from Kazakhstan, on your very successful presidency during the month of January. We express our gratitude and commend your efficient and professional conduct of the work of the Security Council. We particularly appreciate your transparency in dealing with the media, as demonstrated by your presentation, on many occasions, of communiqués to the press.

This month was busy, but it was also very productive, as the Council dealt with important issues for international peace and security. We held two high-level events dedicated to important topics, and the Council undertook a visit to Afghanistan, which was a way to gain a first-hand understanding of the country's needs and priorities and an opportunity to show solidarity with the people of Afghanistan.

Let me now concentrate on three topics that Poland considers important for our activities in the Council.

My first point relates to the role of preventive diplomacy, which was rightfully underlined during several meetings this month. On 18 January, the Council adopted presidential statement S/PRST/2018/1, on conflict prevention. For the first time since 2015, the Council also adopted a press statement (SC/13179) in which it commended the activities of the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia, which can be seen as a positive development. I also believe that presidential statement S/PRST/2018/3, on the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel, which was adopted yesterday, will be a useful tool for maintaining stability in the region.

Secondly, let me mention briefly the issue that is at the forefront of Poland's activities in the Security Council, namely, the role of international law in maintaining peace and security. We see the need for further development of legal instruments in international relations and for the ability to enforce them. In that regard, the high-level briefing on non-proliferation and confidence-building measures, which was held two weeks ago (see S/PV.8160), was most timely and important.

Thirdly, let me also highlight the need for maintaining the Council's unity and ownership, which was demonstrated in yesterday's adoption of resolutions and presidential statements. We will need this level of unity during the upcoming months when discussing the most serious challenges to peace and security, but also humanitarian situations.

January was also a month of deadly terrorist attacks in Afghanistan and Mali. Such tragic events show us how much the Council's activities and unity are needed, and we have to deliver.

In conclusion, I would like once again to thank our colleagues from Kazakhstan and express our gratitude to them.

(*spoke in Arabic*)

I wish Kuwait every success during its presidency of the Council next month.

Mr. Llorentty Solíz (Plurinatinal State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of my delegation, I would like to warmly congratulate and thank you, Mr. President, for your professional, effective and proactive work in guiding the Security Council's work this month. We commend your leadership, and that of your entire delegation, during your presidency.

The vision and perspectives brought by Kazakhstan have been instrumental in the preparation of the programme of work for this month, in which the Security Council placed primary and needed emphasis on the challenges facing Afghanistan and its relationship with the Central Asian region. Presidential statement S/PRST/2018/2, adopted on 19 January, and the debate held on the same day (see S/PV.8162), at which the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan was present, served to lay the groundwork for the Security Council's debate on the existing ties between Afghanistan and Central Asia as a model to link security and development.

In that regard, I would like to emphasize that cooperation between the Central Asian States and Afghanistan is fundamental for the stabilization of that country, particularly with regard to the fight against transnational crime and terrorism. Proof that this issue is essential to the country and the region is the perpetration of four terrorist attacks in the past week, which resulted in the deaths of almost 200 people. We reiterate our gratitude for the bravery and sacrifice that Afghanistan's people, Government and security forces continue to make in the fight against terrorism on behalf of all of us.

In addition, the need for cooperation in the fight against transnational crime and terrorism was demonstrated during the consultations held on 22 January on the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia. During those consultations, we were once again able to stress the importance of intraregional cooperation and Central Asia's cooperation with Afghanistan. We also highlight the Council's adoption of a press release (SC/13179) in support of the work of the Regional Centre, which had not happened since 2015.

Another event that we would like to underscore is the Security Council's visit to Kabul, which allowed us to have a closer look on the ground of the political reality and security in Afghanistan. We highlight the work done by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan in support of the political process in the country. In that regard, for us Security Council members who had the opportunity to travel to Afghanistan with you, Mr. President, the incidents that I described earlier — I am referring to the terrorist attacks perpetrated and suffered in Kabul in recent days — not only are news that one reads with sadness and pain but also become very close personal experiences. That is why we applaud your personal insistence, Mr. President, and that of your delegation that the trip should take place.

We would also like to highlight the emphasis that the presidency placed on the issue of non-proliferation with the holding of the high-level briefing on confidence-building measures (see S/PV.8160), at which the President of Kazakhstan was present. In that context, we highlight the decision of countries such as Kazakhstan to eliminate the possession of nuclear weapons from their defence doctrines and their national security policies. That is a clear example of how, with political will, leadership and resolve, it is possible to achieve that goal.

As a member of the first densely populated area declared free of nuclear weapons and of the first region to declare itself a zone of peace, Bolivia reiterates that it is ready to launch a call for that example to be replicated in other regions. We believe that the best prevention measure is the elimination of all nuclear weapons and other weapons of massive destruction.

In that regard, we highlight the presidential statement on preventive diplomacy (S/PRST/2018/1), adopted on 18 January, which reiterates the need for the Security Council to focus on the prevention of armed conflicts by making effective use of tools such as negotiation, mediation, conciliation, and recourse to regional organizations or arrangements, among others, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations. It also highlights the importance of taking into account the participation of regional and subregional actors in mutual confidence-building measures.

We would also like to highlight the briefing on the peace process in Colombia (see S/PV.8154), which took place on 10 January. It is important to highlight the commitment of the Government of Colombia and of the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC) to implementing the Final Agreement for Ending the Conflict and Building a Stable and Lasting Peace. Although there are significant challenges in the reintegration of former combatants into civilian life, in the strengthening of security in the areas abandoned by the FARC and in specific measures to move forward with comprehensive rural reform, the willingness shown by the parties and by the people of Colombia demonstrate that the peace process is irreversible. With regard to the negotiation process with the Ejército de Liberación Nacional, we regret that it has been suspended. We hope that the talks can be resumed as soon as possible.

To conclude, we highlight the holding of the open debate on the Middle East, including the Palestinian question (see S/PV.8167). We believe that the monthly holding of such a meeting and the focus of our efforts on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict are fundamental to bringing us closer to resolving it. We reiterate that the only way to guarantee a just and lasting peace is through the two-State solution, whereby a free, sovereign and independent Palestinian State can finally be established within the pre-1967 international borders, with East

Jerusalem as its capital, in accordance with the relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions.

In addition to once again congratulating you, Mr. President, on the way in which Kazakhstan carried out the work of the presidency, we pledge all our efforts so that, likewise, the presidency of Kuwait has the same success.

Mr. Hickey (United Kingdom): I would like to begin by congratulating you, Mr. President, and all of your team on a successful presidency. From the first day, when you started what I hope will be a new Security Council tradition by organizing a flag ceremony to welcome the new members, you have managed the Security Council business in an inclusive, transparent and very effective manner.

I will focus my intervention on three of the most pressing threats to international peace and security that the Council has tackled in January — Afghanistan, South Sudan and Syria.

I would first like to welcome the leadership that Kazakhstan has demonstrated on Afghanistan. The Security Council visit that you, Mr. President, organized strengthened our collective understanding of the conflict and established many areas of consensus among Council members. However, as my Dutch colleague has already highlighted today, the terrible events of the past week, with multiple terrorist attacks claiming many innocent lives, remind us of the scale of the threat faced by the people of Afghanistan and the need for the Council to work together to promote security and stability.

As we all agreed, there can be no purely military solution to the conflict. Long-term peace and stability will be achieved only through a peace process that is Afghan-led and Afghan-owned. Regional cooperation is essential for that, and I would like to commend Kazakhstan again for convening the important ministerial discussion on building regional partnership in Afghanistan and Central Asia (see S/PV.8162). Progress towards the holding of credible and inclusive parliamentary elections this year and presidential elections next year is another important step towards stability.

Looking ahead, the mandate renewal of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan in March presents a valuable opportunity to streamline the Mission. That will allow us to concentrate on the most crucial areas to support the Government of Afghanistan's efforts to achieve a long-time peace.

This month we have also discussed the situation in South Sudan. We all were clear and united in our concern about the continued violence and the actions of all parties to the conflict. After making our expectations clear in last month's presidential statement (S/PRST/2017/25), we now need to make the consequences clear to violators of the cessation of hostilities and to those who undermine the High-Level Revitalization Forum. To prevent further violence, the effective monitoring and attribution of violations will be essential. Obstruction and criticism of the ceasefire and transitional security arrangements for monitoring must end immediately.

We reiterate our call today for an arms embargo. It would apply equally to all parties and would not single anyone out for blame. It would send a strong message to spoilers and strengthen those attempting to bring the South Sudanese parties to peace. It is in line with what the region has called for — clear consequences for violators.

Finally, let me turn to Syria. The sharp deterioration in the already dire humanitarian situation occurs as the Al-Assad regime continues to use aid as a weapon of war and denies humanitarian access to those most desperately in need. No progress has been made on accessing the 2.5 million people in besieged and hard-to-reach areas. The request of the Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs for agreement to allow three or four United Nations and Syrian Arab Red Crescent convoys each week across front lines to those areas has been ignored. Children in eastern Ghouta are dying as they wait for the regime's approval to be medically evacuated.

This month, the continued indiscriminate aerial bombardment of Idlib has caused countless civilian casualties, targeted hospitals and displaced 270,000 people within Idlib itself, stretching the already scarce resources beyond their limits. UNICEF has reported that, in the first 14 days of 2018, more than 30 children were killed by escalating violence in besieged eastern Ghouta.

The Council has agreed that we should put aside our differences over the political situation in order to tackle humanitarian issues. However, despite all the rhetoric, we have not seen any progress and, more important, nor have the people of eastern Ghouta. They

are still besieged, starving and cut off by the Syrian regime from any help. As the Security Council, we cannot allow that to continue for yet another month. The Syrian regime must allow the delivery of essential aid and medical evacuation for those who need it most. The Council must be able to express itself clearly on the matter and uphold its responsibilities.

Mr. Alotaibi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to express my deep appreciation to you, Mr. President, and to your team for your hard work this month and for the professional way in which you led the Security Council deliberations.

Together, we were able to adopt a number of resolutions, presidential statements and press statements, which reflected the unity of the Security Council towards the various issues under its consideration. You, Sir, were also keen to provide the press with information after informal consultations held in January.

In our view, the holding of today's meeting represents an occasion to review the Council's work during an unusually eventful month. In that regard, I would like to highlight some of the important achievements of your presidency and address additional points, as follows.

First, the important field visit of Council members to Afghanistan was the first since 2010. It demonstrated the Council's commitment to closely monitoring the latest developments in one of the most important conflicts on its agenda. We reaffirm the importance of such field visits, which provide an opportunity to follow developments on the ground in conflict zones, understand the real challenges faced by countries in question and realize the responsibilities of the Council to meet all needs and requirements so as to achieve international peace and security.

Secondly, the open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question (S/PV.8167), proved that it is now high time to end the Israeli occupation of Arab and Palestinian territories so that the Palestinian people can exercise all their rights, including their right to establish a Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital and along the 4 June 1967 borders, as provided for in the resolutions of international legitimacy and the relevant Security Council resolutions.

Thirdly, Kuwait is co-penholder with Sweden on the humanitarian situation in Syria. As such, we are prepared to take the lead in reaching a unified position in the Council to improve the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Syria; to expand the range of humanitarian assistance so that it can reach different parts of Syria, such as Eastern Ghouta, Idlib, and north of Aleppo; and to provide protection to civilians in the light of the increasing violence there.

Fourthly, with regard to presidential note S/2017/507, we have come together today to implement its most salient elements. As Chair of the Informal Working Group on Documentation and Other Procedural Questions, I take this opportunity to announce, in my capacity as President of the Council next month, that we will hold an open debate in the first week of February to hear statements and recommendations by United Nations States Members — not only Security Council members — on how to increase transparency and improve the performance of the Security Council. That will allow us to identify ways to improve our working methods during our presidency.

In conclusion, I thank all Council members that have offered their good wishes and support to Kuwait's presidency of the Council as of tomorrow. We look forward to cooperating with all Council members so that the Council can carry out its tasks, shoulder its responsibilities and implement its mandate for maintaining international peace and security. We will ensure that the presidency is transparent and cooperative in a constructive manner with all Member States.

The President: As this is the last scheduled meeting of the Security Council for the month of January, I would like to reiterate the sincere appreciation of the delegation of Kazakhstan to the members of the Council, especially my colleagues the Permanent Representatives, their respective staffs and the secretariat of the Council, for all the support they have given to us. Indeed, it has been a busy month, and one in which we rallied to consensus on several important issues within our purview. We could not have done it alone, or without the hard work, support and positive contributions of every delegation and the representatives of the Secretariat, as well as all the conference service officers, interpreters and security staff.

As we end our presidency, I know that I speak on behalf of the Council in wishing the delegation of Kuwait good luck in the month of February. As a token of our appreciation, we have distributed to each delegation photographs to commemorate our work together and limited-edition commemorative stamps.

The meeting rose at 11.35 a.m.

United Nations S/PV.8174

Security Council

Seventy-third year

Provisional

8174th meeting
Monday, 5 February 2018, 10 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Alotaibi	(Kuwait)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Llorentty Soliz
	China	Mr. Wu Haitao
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Tanoh-Boutchoue
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Ndong Mba
	Ethiopia	Mr. Alemu
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Umarov
	Netherlands	Mr. Van Oosterom
	Peru	Mr. Meza-Cuadra
	Poland	Ms. Wronecka
	Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia
	Sweden	Mr. Skoog
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Allen
	United States of America	Mrs. Haley

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

Letter dated 1 February 2018 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2018/84)

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the translation of speeches delivered in other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room U-0506 (verbatimrecords@un.org). Corrected records will be reissued electronically on the Official Document System of the United Nations (http://documents.un.org).

18-03099 (E)

Accessible document Please recycle

The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Expression of thanks to the outgoing President

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): As this is the first public meeting of the Security Council for the month of February, I should like to take this opportunity to pay tribute, on behalf of the Council, to His Excellency Ambassador Kairat Umarov, Permanent Representative of Kazakhstan, for his service as President of the Council for the month of January. I am sure I speak for all members of the Council in expressing deep appreciation to Ambassador Umarov and his team for the great diplomatic skill with which they conducted the Council's business last month.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

Letter dated 1 February 2018 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2018/84)

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Ms. Izumi Nakamitsu, High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2018/84, which contains the text of a letter dated 1 February 2018 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council.

I now give the floor to Ms. Nakamitsu.

Ms. Nakamitsu: I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for this opportunity to brief the Security Council once again on the implementation of resolution 2118 (2013), on the elimination of the Syrian Arab Republic's chemical-weapons programme.

I remain in regular contact with the Director-General of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) to discuss matters related to this issue; I spoke to him last week. In addition, I met with the Chargé d'affaires of the Permanent Mission of the Syrian Arab Republic to the United Nations this past Friday.

At the time of my previous briefing, planning was under way with regard to the destruction of the remaining two stationary above-ground facilities of the 27 declared by the Syrian Arab Republic. I am informed that the OPCW, working with the United Nations Office for Project Services, is currently at the stage of finalizing a contract with a private company to carry out the destruction, which I understand could be completed within two months.

There have been some developments on the issues related to Syria's initial declaration and subsequent amendments. The translation and analysis of documents that were provided to the OPCW by the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic in November have been completed. The OPCW has indicated that this information provided clarifications on some issues. However, the OPCW is continuing to follow up with the Government of Syria on the remaining gaps, inconsistencies and discrepancies. The Director-General will submit a report in that regard to the next session of the OPCW Executive Council, which will take place in March.

Further to its routine inspections in Syria, samples taken by the OPCW team during its second inspection at the Syrian Scientific Studies and Research Centre are currently being analysed by two OPCW-designated laboratories. The Executive Council will be informed of the results of the inspection via a separate note from the Director-General to the next session of the Executive Council.

The OPCW Fact-finding Mission continues to look into all allegations of the use of chemical weapons in Syria, the majority of which involve the use of toxic chemicals, such a chlorine, in areas not under the control of the Government. The Fact-finding Mission expects to submit a report on the allegations very soon. In addition, another Fact-finding Mission team has been looking into allegations of the use of chemical weapons brought to the attention of the OPCW by the Government of Syria. At the time of our previous briefing, a Fact-finding Mission team was in Damascus, at the invitation of the Government, to look into several of those allegations. I am informed that a report in that regard is also pending.

There is still work to do before resolution 2118 (2013) can be considered to have been fully implemented, and for the international community to have shared confidence that the chemical-weapons programme of the Syrian Arab Republic has been fully eliminated. Moreover, allegations of the use of chemical weapons in Syria have continued, including just this past weekend in the town of Saraqeb. That makes abundantly clear our continuing and collective responsibility to ensure that those responsible are held to account.

New reports by the Fact-finding Mission are pending. Should they conclude that there has been the use, or likely use, of chemical weapons in any of those alleged incidents, our obligation to enact a meaningful response will be further intensified. It is my hope, and the hope of the Secretary-General, that such a response will favour unity, not impunity. As always, the Office for Disarmament Affairs stands ready to provide whatever support and assistance it can.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank Ms. Nakamitsu for her briefing.

I shall now give the floor to those Council members who wish to make statements.

Mrs. Haley (United States of America): The news out of Syria this morning is following a troubling pattern. There are reports of yet another chemical-weapon attack on Sunday. Victims of what appears to be chlorine gas are pouring into hospitals. Few things have horrified my country and the world as much as the Al-Assad regime's use of chemical weapons against its people. The Security Council has been outspoken on ending Syria's use of chemical weapons, and yet they continue.

Under the Chemical Weapons Convention and resolution 2118 (2013), the Al-Assad regime's obligations are clear: it must immediately stop using all chemical weapons. It must address the gaps and inconsistencies in its Chemical Weapons Convention declaration. And it must destroy all of its remaining chemical weapons under the supervision of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). These are worthy goals. These are urgent goals. Yet we spent much of last year in the Council watching one country protect the Al-Assad regime's use of chemical weapons by refusing to hold them responsible.

What do the American people see? What do people of all countries see? They see a Council that cannot agree to take action, even after the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism, created by the Council, found that the Al-Assad regime used chemical weapons. Now we have reports that the Al-Assad regime has used chlorine gas against its people multiple times in recent weeks, including just yesterday. There is obvious evidence from dozens of victims, and therefore we proposed a draft press statement by the Security Council condemning these attacks. So far, Russia has delayed the adoption of the draft statement — a simple condemnation of Syrian children being suffocated by chlorine gas. I hope Russia takes the appropriate step to adopt the draft text, thus showing that the Council is unified in condemning chemical-weapon attacks.

Accountability is a fundamental principle, but it is just the first step. Our goal must be to end the use of these evil, unjustifiable weapons. When actions have consequences — when perpetrators are identified and punished — we come closer to reaching our goal. But if we cannot even take the first step of establishing accountability for the use of chemical weapons, we have to seriously ask ourselves why we are here. The requirements for establishing accountability for the use of chemical weapons have not changed since the Council voted unanimously to create the Joint Investigative Mechanism, in 2015. They have not changed since Russia acted alone to kill the Mechanism last year. Such a mechanism must be independent and impartial. It must be free of politics. It must be controlled by experts, not politicians or diplomats. And it must be definitive.

The latest Russian draft resolution does not meet any of those criteria. Russia's draft resolution completely ignores the findings of the Joint Investigative Mechanism, which was an investigation that Russia supported until the investigators found the Al-Assad regime to be responsible. That should already be enough to make us sceptical. However, there are other deep problems. For their new investigation, Russia wants to be able to cherry-pick the investigators. It wants to insert unnecessary and arbitrary investigative standards. And it wants the Security Council to be able to review all the findings of this investigation and decide what makes it into the final report. That is not an impartial mechanism; it is a way to whitewash the findings of the last investigation that Russia desperately wants to bury. No one should believe that the draft resolution is a good basis for discussion, when it is designed to undermine our core principles on chemical weapons. We cannot

hope to end the use of chemical weapons if those who use them escape the consequences of their actions.

Therefore, while we regret the need for its creation, we applaud the efforts of France to launch the International Partnership against Impunity for the Use of Chemical Weapons. That is yet another way to hold accountable the Al-Assad regime and any group that uses chemical weapons. The United States has also announced that we will contribute to the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011. The United States strongly supports the Mechanism as a valuable tool to hold the Al-Assad regime accountable for its atrocities, including its repeated and ongoing use of chemical weapons.

It is a true tragedy that Russia has sent us back to square one in the effort to end the use of chemical weapons in Syria. But we will not cease in our efforts to know the truth of the Al-Assad regime — and ensure that the truth is known and acted on by the international community. That is why we hosted all 15 members of the Council at the United States Holocaust Museum last week. The exhibit was called "Syria: Please Don't Forget Us". All of us saw undeniable evidence of the Al-Assad regime's atrocities and human rights violations. We cannot, and should not, forget the Syrian people. The United States will not forget them. While the Council has not yet been able to act to provide real accountability for the use of chemical weapons in Syria, the United States will not give up on the responsibility to do so. That is the sincere wish of the American people, and I know that it is shared by many on the Council. We are not motivated by score-settling, payback or power politics. We are motivated by the urgent need to end the unique and horrible suffering that chemical weapons have inflicted on innocent men, women and children in Syria. The Syrian people are counting on us.

Mr. Allen (United Kingdom): I would like to thank High Representative Nakamitsu for her briefing.

We are holding this meeting in the open Chamber today after reports of a series of chemical attacks in eastern Ghouta within the past month, as the Al-Assad regime continues its merciless bombing and killing of civilians. Over the weekend, there were further allegations of the use of chemical weapons in Idlib, as well as air strikes by pro-regime forces that reportedly hit three hospitals, leaving doctors scrambling to remove premature babies from their incubators in order to move them. I cannot say that they were moving them to safety, because the reality is that for the citizens of Idlib and eastern Ghouta, nowhere is safe.

We are appalled by this violence and the reports of deliberate targeting of civilians and civilian infrastructure, and we call on all parties to the conflict to uphold international humanitarian law and protect civilians. The Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) is already investigating reports of the use of chemical weapons in recent weeks, but establishing who is responsible for that use will be much more difficult, because Russia has vetoed the continuation of the independent, expert OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) three times, in order to protect the Al-Assad regime. We would welcome any serious attempt to re-establish a properly independent investigative and attribution mechanism for continuing the JIM's meticulous work. Sadly, we do not yet see that in the Russian proposal. Any successor investigation must be empowered to investigate all use of chemical weapons, whoever the perpetrator may be. Yet the Russian proposal focuses only on non-State actors. We have repeatedly condemned Da'esh for its use of chemical weapons, which the JIM clearly reported. But given Al-Assad's track record of chemical-weapon use and its failure to comply with the Chemical Weapons Convention, it is imperative to ensure that any new mechanism also investigates the use of chemical weapons by the Syrian regime.

A second objection is the proposal that experts would merely gather evidence, leaving the Council to decide what it meant. No other United Nations expert panel that I know of is specifically prohibited from reaching conclusions and reporting to the Council on its findings on what has happened. We are not specialists on chemical weapons around this table. We rely on independent, United Nations-selected expert panels. The entire purpose of the JIM was that an independent panel would reach conclusions on the basis of the evidence, taking the issue out of the hands of us, the Member States and Council members, because we have been unable to agree. Russia's proposal looks as if it is designed to avoid the political embarrassment of having to use its veto power to defend the indefensible when independent bodies report on what has truly happened. The underlying intent seems to be to ensure that there are no clear conclusions in future reports.

Thirdly, we object to the proposal's demands that the standard of proof should be beyond reasonable doubt. That standard has not been used in any other comparable past or current United Nations investigation. It is used in relation to criminal prosecutions in courts of law, which have significantly greater investigative powers and independence than those envisaged in Russia's text.

Finally, the proposal insists on site visits, despite the explicit provision in the Chemical Weapons Convention for other ways to gather relevant evidence, recognizing the difficulty of safe and timely visits. There is no scientific basis for this proposal. It is simply an attempt to hamstring future investigations and discredit the JIM. Of course, Russia made much of the lack of a site visit to Khan Shaykhun, despite the fact that the Al-Assad regime handed over to the United Nations samples from the site that contained chemical signatures unique to regime sarin, obviating the need for such a visit. It is for those reasons that the current text is unacceptable. The JIM set a high standard of impartiality and expertise. We expect that standard from any future mechanism.

The Syrian regime, of course, claims not to have used chemical weapons. Yet over the years two separate reports from the JIM, under separate leadership panels, drawing on a broad range of respected independent international experts, concluded that the regime had used chlorine at least three times — in Talmenes in April 2014 and in Sarmin and Qmenas in March 2015 — and had used sarin to attack Khan Shaykhun in April 2017. We should also remember the infamous attack in eastern Ghouta in August 2013, when a separate United Nations investigation found that sarin was used to kill hundreds and injure thousands. That attack brought near-universal international condemnation, and following our concerted international pressure, Syria joined the Chemical Weapons Convention. Syria promised, as it was legally obliged to do, to destroy and abandon its chemical-weapon programme. Yet it has been unable to satisfy inspectors that it has done so. We have to ask ourselves why that is. In 2013 Russia promised to act as a guarantor for the Al-Assad regime's compliance with the Chemical Weapons Convention. Yet month after month we all sit here and hear that Al-Assad has not done so. Why does Russia not compel the Syrian regime to comply with its obligations and make it impossible for it to use chemical weapons?

Tragically, for the people of Syria, the regime continues to use chemical weapons with impunity. If it is confirmed that Al-Assad has again used chemical weapons on his own people, it would not only be another entry in the catalogue of his war crimes, it would also be another attack on us all. Members of the United Nations who have worked for decades — in the words of the Chemical Weapons Convention, for the sake of all mankind — to completely exclude the possibility of the use of chemical weapons. Throughout history, our peoples have said "never again" — among others, starting with the First World War battlefields, in Ethiopia, in Manchuria and in Saddam Hussein's attacks on Iran and on Iraqi Kurds. Let us, the members of the Council, stand up for the peoples of the United Nations, determined that such abhorrent chemical weapons should never be used. Let us stand up for the people of Syria and give them a real investigation into those responsible for the use of chemical weapons — an investigation that pursues justice for the horrific crimes committed against them. Let us signal our determination to pursue accountability by all means available, even if one member of the Security Council is currently preventing us from taking action here.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): I would first like to congratulate Kuwait through you, Mr. President, on the start of its presidency of the Security Council. You can rely on France's support in the month to come. I would also like to thank Izumi Nakamitsu for her usual very informative briefing.

This is the second time we have met in less than two weeks after reports of four new cases of the use of chlorine against Syria's civilian population, some of them in Idlib province, which is a de-escalation zone. We are examining the information that is available and waiting for the conclusions of the investigative mechanism, but the reality is that resorting to toxic substances as weapons has never ended in Syria. I would like to remind the Council that the Syrian regime has already been identified as the perpetrator in four such cases, one of which involved the use of sarin, in violation of international humanitarian law and the obligations that Syria assumed when it acceded to the Chemical Weapons Convention.

The challenges go beyond the Syrian issue. A century after the end of the First World War, in which mustard gas was used on a massive scale against civilians, what we are seeing is shocking. These weapons, which we had thought were a thing of the past, are once again being used methodically and systematically by the Syrian regime against its own people. Furthermore, there is a real threat of such

weapons falling into the hands of terrorists. The threat is all the greater given the fact that the dismantling of the Syrian chemical-weapon programme remains at a deadlock. The cooperation of the Syrian regime with the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) has for months taken place in a piecemeal manner, and suspicions remain about the status of Syrian stockpiles.

I would recall that OPCW expert teams have repeatedly found at Syrian sites indicators of undeclared substances, without any convincing explanation being provided by the country. Given that chemical weapons continue to be used, it seems that Syria has lied and maintained clandestine capacities. The situation is aggravating regional instability, undermining the non-proliferation regime and weakening the international security architecture, as well as jeopardizing the security of each of our States. It represents a violation of the law and flouts the most fundamental principles of humanity.

The international community cannot downplay the situation and allow the perpetrators of these heinous crimes to remain unpunished. It is the responsibility of the Security Council to prevent this; it is our shared responsibility. The criminals who chose to design and use these barbaric weapons must be punished. At stake is the future of our collective security system; no one can be allowed to undermine its foundations without facing consequences.

The hindrances and obstructions facing the international community's initiatives within existing bodies contribute to promoting impunity, and this we cannot accept. For that reason, France launched in Paris an open, pragmatic partnership that brings together States that reject impunity for individuals involved in chemical-weapon attacks or in the development of chemical-weapon programmes. It brings together all the States concerned about the threat of erosion of the non-proliferation regime and of strategic stability. It was designed to support all international bodies and investigative mechanisms in their efforts. This universal partnership applies to all instances of the use of such weapons throughout the world by all perpetrators, be they State or non-State actors. The partnership is open, and States that embrace these principles are invited to join.

Like everyone else here, we hope that a mechanism for the identification of those responsible will be recreated as soon as possible. However, any sincere and credible effort to that end must align with the basic standards of independence, impartiality and professionalism that underpinned the Joint Investigative Mechanism, as the very reason for the establishment of such a regime is to determine the truth. Within the Council, France will be very vigilant with respect to the principles listed and will not accept a lesser mechanism.

Impunity in Syria is not an option. The perpetrators of all of the crimes committed in Syria will be held accountable, sooner or later. The International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism for Syria, which we support, is a part of that process. That is the only way to ensure lasting peace in Syria, and this can come about only in the framework of an inclusive political solution in Geneva, in line with resolution 2254 (2015), which more than ever before represents our shared compass.

The repeated use of chemical weapons in Syria has been proved. We cannot turn a blind eye to this, for no one can now say that they did not know. Denial or hypocrisy, or a combination of of the two, cannot be presented as a strategy. The persistent use of chemical weapons in Syria represents a violation of the universal conscience as well as the most fundamental principles of international law. It also poses a potentially lethal threat to the sustainability of the international non-proliferation regime, which is the most comprehensive and successful of all of the international non-proliferation regimes. To allow it to be undermined without any response would be to accept the erosion of the entire international regime for the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction that we have built together, stone by stone, over the course of decades and which constitutes the very backbone of the international security architecture as well as one of the paramount gains of multilateralism.

On behalf of France, I call on all members of the Security Council to shift their attitudes and adjust their focus. The heavy responsibility that we all bear requires that we join together and take action.

Mr. Llorenty Soliz (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): My delegation wishes to congratulate you once again, Sir, as well as the Permanent Mission of Kuwait, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the month of February. We are also grateful for the briefing provided by the Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, Ms. Izumi Nakamitsu. We also

wish to acknowledge the letter sent by the Secretary-General (S/2018/84) concerning the periodic report of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW).

Bolivia believes that there can be no justification for the use of chemical weapons, regardless of circumstances and by whomsoever committed, as such use is a serious violation of international law and poses a grave threat to international peace and security. We therefore categorically condemn the use of chemical weapons or substances as weapons, as we deem this an unjustifiable and criminal act, wherever, whenever and by whomsoever committed.

In that context, we express our grave concern about the ongoing reports of the use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic, especially in eastern Ghouta. If that is confirmed, the Council should remain united in order to ensure that the perpetrators are held accountable and brought to justice, so that there is no impunity for their actions.

We commend the coordination between the OPCW and the United Nations Office for Project Services in all of the arrangements aimed at making possible the destruction of the two remaining facilities as well as the preparedness of the Syrian Government to achieve this end. We call on the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic to cooperate with the OPCW on this initiative, as well as during the second inspection of the Syrian Scientific Studies and Research Centre.

We encourage the Fact-finding Mission to continue its investigation so that, in accordance with its mandate, it can investigate, in the most objective, methodical and technical manner, reports of the use of chemicals weapons on Syrian territory. In that regard, we highlight the latest visit to the city of Damascus during January, and we will await the results thereof.

We call on all parties involved to cooperate fully as well as to provide viable and reliable information, so that an effective investigation of all of the ongoing cases can be conducted as soon as possible.

Concerned about the reports of the use of chemical weapons, we deem it essential to establish as soon as possible an independent, impartial and representative mechanism to carry out a full, reliable and conclusive investigation of the cases referred by the Fact-finding Mission that will make it possible to identify those responsible for such acts. Nevertheless, if we want to create a new, transparent accountability mechanism, we have the major challenge and the responsibility of not instrumentalizing the Security Council for political ends.

In that vein, we view the Russian proposal as a new and positive opportunity to reach this goal. We therefore call on the members of the Council to commit themselves to a process of purposeful negotiation, and we echo the words of the Secretary-General in his letter transmitting the current report, calling on the Security Council to demonstrate unity on this issue, which is so vital for the international community.

Finally, we reiterate that the only option for resolving the conflict in Syria and prevent more people from becoming victims is through an inclusive political transition led by and benefiting the Syrian people that respects their sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity.

Mr. Umarov (Kazakhstan): Since this is the first public meeting of the Security Council for the month of February, I would like to congratulate the delegation of Kuwait on the commencement of its presidency and wish it great success in implementing its ambitious programme of work. I am grateful to High Representative Nakamitsu for her informative briefing.

Our position on this issue remains unchanged. We strongly condemn any use of chemical weapons and advocate that such threats must be eliminated in the future. We firmly believe that there must be accountability for perpetrators of such crimes. Today I would like to concentrate on three major points.

First, we support the work of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), as reflected in its fifty-second report (S/2018/84, annex). The speedy destruction, probably in two months, of the remaining chemical-weapon production facilities and resolving all outstanding issues relating to the declaration of the Syrian Arab Republic are of the utmost importance. That would help to dispel all existing doubts on many principal issues and to comprehend the real situation in the country. It is commendable that, during the inspection of Barzah and Jamrayah, all samples were sealed, packaged and shipped to OPCW's laboratory and were received there in the presence of the representatives of the Syrian Arab Republic, observing all established rules. We look forward to the follow-up to the OPCW's work, and we will also await the results

of a thorough analysis of the documents submitted by Syria by the Declaration Assessment Team.

Secondly, the continuing reports on the alleged use of chemical weapons in Syria are extremely alarming. But the most alarming fact is that the Council has not yet restored its investigative potential to properly respond to such cases. I recall the words of the Secretary-General, who pointed to the serious gap that had arisen at the end of the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism, which leaves one with the feeling that impunity will continue without any strict monitoring.

Thirdly, and lastly, considering the current developments, it is also most critical that a new mechanism be established as soon as possible. We here in the Council are not experts on chemical weapons — neither to judge or blame anyone — but must act on the basis of credible evidence provided to us by an independent, impartial and representative investigative body we can all trust. In that regard, we support the ongoing consultations on creating a new investigative instrument, in order to prevent any further use of chemical weapons and to bring perpetrators to justice. We are ready to participate actively and contribute to the earliest revival and ultimate realization of our investigative potential.

Mr. Meza-Cuadra (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): We join others in congratulating your delegation, Sir, on having assumed the presidency of the Security Council for the month of February. We support you in discharging your tasks, which we are sure you will do in full. We welcome the holding of this meeting and thank Ms. Izumi Nakamitsu for her valuable briefing on this topic.

Peru condemns the use of chemical weapons by any actor, in any place and under any circumstance. Their use against the civilian population in Syria is a war crime and a flagrant violation of international law, international humanitarian law and the non-proliferation regimes. In that regard, Peru believes it is essential for the international community, and in particular the Security Council, to remain resolute and united in its support for the non-proliferation regime and in ensuring that those responsible for these atrocious crimes — which are also threats to international peace and security — be held accountable. We must continue to demand that the Syrian Government fulfil its commitment to cooperate with the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) in the elimination of all of its chemical weapons.

We take note of some recent progress, such as the imminent destruction of the last two declared chemical-weapon production facilities, as verified preliminarily by the OPCW last November, and the allocation of new financial resources to that end. Nevertheless, we are concerned that key points of the Syrian Government's declaration have yet to be verified, more than four years after its accession to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on Their Destruction. We hope that the 19 recently translated documents that were provided to the OPCW will help rectify errors and omissions and clear up discrepancies. We reaffirm our commitment and support to the OPCW, whose Executive Council Peru is honoured to be a member of.

In the face of new reports of chemical-weapon attacks in eastern Ghouta and Idlib, Peru expresses its solidarity with the victims and reiterates the urgent need to identify and bring to justice the perpetrators of such atrocities. Like a majority of Council members, we believe that accountability is essential to safeguarding the international non-proliferation regimes. Preventing this threat requires a credible deterrent. With that goal in mind, we believe it is urgent to establish an attributive mechanism with the highest standards of professionalism, objectivity, transparency and, primarily, independence in order to fill the gap left by the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism. My delegation will continue to work constructively to create a new mechanism that addresses the legitimate concerns of all Council members and of the international community.

Mr. Skoog (Sweden): I also want to congratulate you, Mr. President, on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for the month of February. I also thank Ms. Izumi Nakamitsu for her briefing today.

In recent weeks there have been new, alarming reports of alleged chemical-weapon attacks in Syria. The most recent allegation was this weekend in Idlib. These reported attacks must be immediately investigated by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) Fact-finding Mission, to which we offer our full and unreserved support.

We reiterate our strongest condemnation of the use of chemical weapons. It is a serious violation

of international law and it constitutes a threat to international peace and security. Their use in armed conflict amounts to a war crime. Perpetrators of such crimes must be held accountable. We cannot accept impunity.

That is why Sweden joined the International Partnership against Impunity for the Use of Chemical Weapons, initiated by France. As a member of the Security Council and of the OPCW Executive Council, we support all international efforts to combat the use and proliferation of chemical weapons by State and non-State actors alike anywhere in the world. We count on this initiative to complement and support our collective work in multilateral forums, as well as the existing multilateral mechanisms to achieve unity around those important goals. That also includes the Human Rights Council's Commission of Inquiry and the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism, both of which have important mandates in collecting information.

I again thank High Representative Nakamitsu for her briefing today. She reminded us that work remains on the implementation of resolution 2118 (2013). The outstanding issues relating to Syria's initial declaration must be resolved without further delay. We again call upon the Syrian authorities to fully cooperate with the OPCW in that regard.

As the Secretary-General has stated, the continuing allegations highlight yet again our shared obligation to identify and hold to account those responsible for the use chemical weapons on Syria. We need to heed his call, come together and act. That is why Sweden has engaged in the negotiations on establishing a new independent and impartial attributive mechanism. The Council has a responsibility to protect the international disarmament and non-proliferation regimes and for ensuring accountability. Negotiations need to be in good faith, but with the objective of establishing a truly independent, impartial and effective mechanism for accountability.

Ms. Wronecka (Poland) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to take this opportunity to wish the delegation of Kuwait every success in implementing the programme of work for this month.

(*spoke in English*)

Let me thank High Representative Izumi Nakamitsu for her informative briefing. We appreciate the ongoing work of the Technical Secretariat of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and the Fact-finding Mission. We welcome the cooperation between the secretariat and the United Nations Office for Project Services, which facilitated the destruction of the two remaining chemical-weapon production facilities. We look forward to the results of the analysis by the Declaration Assessment Team of a set of documents and declarations submitted by Syria.

Chemical weapons continue to pose a threat to the people of Syria. Repeated allegations of the use of chemical weapons in Syria, including the recent ones, serve to underline the fact that there is still a challenge to international peace and security, as well as to the credibility of the Chemical Weapons Convention regime. In that context, there is a genuine need for a clear message that impunity for perpetrators is not an option.

We have clearly stated in various forums that the use of chemical weapons by anyone — State and non-State actors alike — anywhere and under any circumstances must be rigorously condemned and those responsible for such acts must be held accountable. We agree that the Security Council needs to take steps in order to establish a credible, professional and independent investigative mechanism. We have therefore engaged in the discussions to find the best solution for the future mechanism. I would like to focus on three points.

First, Poland has supported the work of the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) and continues to support the establishment of an independent and credible investigative mechanism aimed at holding accountable the perpetrators of the use of chemical weapons in Syria. However, a future mechanism will not operate in a void. The instrument must build on the Joint Investigative Mechanism. Not only should it build on the significant achievements of the JIM, but its mandate must not deviate from resolution 2235 (2015).

Secondly, the mandate of the mechanism should be balanced. There is a need to identify not only the individuals, entities and groups but also the Governments responsible for any use of chemicals as weapons.

Thirdly, one of the most important elements of the mandate must be to ensure that the mechanism is independent in its proceedings and conclusions and

free from the pressure of political verification of its conclusions by the Council.

Mr. Ndong Mba (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): Allow me once again to congratulate you, Mr. President, and the State of Kuwait on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the month of February. I wish you every success and assure you of our full support. Allow me also to express my congratulations and appreciation to Ms. Izumi Nakamitsu, Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, and her team for the presentation of the comprehensive and detailed briefing on the current political and humanitarian situation with regard to chemical weapons in Syria.

The political — and in particular the humanitarian — crisis in Syria is reaching alarming proportions. The Republic of Equatorial Guinea expresses its solidarity with the families of the countless victims, as well as with the thousands of displaced people trapped by the hostilities and the more than 13 million people who currently need humanitarian assistance as a result of the continuing conflict.

I would like to take this opportunity to condemn the loss of numerous civilian lives in this conflict, and I call on all parties to comply with international law on the protection of civilians and to distinguish between military and civilian objectives and refrain from firing rocket launchers into populated areas, as is being reported in eastern Ghouta.

Equatorial Guinea can only express its satisfaction at the destruction of almost all the chemical-weapon production facilities declared by the Syrian Arab Republic thanks to the technical assistance of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). However, while we welcome the cooperation between the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic and the OPCW, it is necessary to be vigilant and to continue to condemn in the strongest terms any possible use, development, acquisition or manufacture of chemical weapons in the country or transfers of such weapons to other States or non-State actors. In that regard, we vigorously condemn the recent use of toxic chemical weapons by whomsoever. The perpetrators of such horrendous acts must be brought to justice and sentenced appropriately.

For seven years already, Syria has been a war scenario that crystallizes internal, regional and, even, international divisions. The primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security bestowed upon the Security Council by the Charter of the United Nations should lead the 15 member countries of this principal organ of the United Nations to overcome their differences regarding the situation in Syria and to renounce their political and strategic interests in favour of the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people to achieve well-being and prosperity.

In that regard, it is appropriate that, as Russia has already proposed, another mechanism be established to replace the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism so that it can carry out the necessary investigations on the use of chemical weapons in Syria and thereby arrive at a result that garners consensus among the members of the Council in order to again unify our criteria for an objective examination of the situation.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): At the outset, I would like to congratulate you, Mr. President, at the beginning of your presidency of the Security Council for the month of February. I wish you every success. We also thank Ms. Nakamitsu for her briefing.

We trust that, with the assistance of the United Nations Office for Project Services and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), the two remaining above-ground Syrian chemical-weapon facilities will be promptly destroyed. The Syrian side has repeatedly demonstrated its interest in that. The pending issues related to the initial declarations should be dealt with as part of the dialogue between the OPCW and the Syrian Government. We welcome such cooperation, by which Syria, as a conscientious party to the Chemical Weapons Convention, provides the necessary assistance, complies with its obligations and facilitates access to the relevant documents.

Many people have raised false issues that should now be closed and put aside. Syria's chemical-weapon capacity was destroyed under the oversight of the OPCW. However, it seems that there are some who wish to contrive to fan the flames on the issue. The Syrians have provided exhaustive explanations. However, issues are being raised and questions are being asked in a endless cycle. The Syrian side consistently reports to the international community, including the Security Council, about the detection of toxic chemical substances in areas liberated from the terrorists. There

are reports from Syria about possible provocations that may be used by representatives of foreign intelligence services. All such reports must be investigated immediately by the experts of the OPCW.

However, we note that, in general, tremendous efforts are necessary for The Hague to duly respond to the important message. There are numerous pretexts being put forward not to travel there and decisions are being delayed. In the light of last year's story of Khan Shaykhun and the Shayrat air base, such conduct suggests deliberate sabotage.

However, the statements today have left us with the impression that it is not Syria that some delegations are interested in. The United States and the United Kingdom have used today's meeting to slander Russia, and it is quite clear why that is happening. Someone cannot tolerate the success of the Syrian National Dialogue Congress in Sochi and the prospects it offers for injecting new momentum into the political process in Syria. That requires launching a major campaign of slander against Russia in order to try, not for the first time, to cast doubt on Russia's role in the Syrian political settlement. As always, the statements of these representatives contain a grain of truth mixed with mountains of lies. Russia has never contested the use of sarin in Khan Shaykhun. But who it was used by is still a mystery, because the absurd conclusions of the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) have not convinced us.

In the past few days there has been general uproar about alleged incidents involving the use of chlorine in some Damascus suburbs. There has already been talk of the use of sarin. Where? When? By whom? The outlines of this propaganda campaign are not new. The terrorists, through the social associations that are closely linked to them, foremost among them the notorious White Helmets, spread rumours via social networks. These are instantly picked up by the Western press, and then we get representatives speechifying in the Security Council, making unproved accusations about the so-called Syrian regime and spreading slander about Russia. I have said it before and I will say it again: has anyone thought to ask the basic question as to why the Syrian Government needs to use chemical weapons? What do we suppose that could do for it?

The first thing we should do, and various speakers today, particularly the representative of Sweden, have discussed this, is to send an OPCW fact-finding mission to those areas to investigate. Where is the presumption of innocence? The speakers are blaming the so-called regime for everything in advance, before any investigation. What do they want an independent investigative mechanism for? Surely at least they know that an investigation has to precede any conclusions. But apparently they do not need one. In my opinion, it should be completely clear to everyone that that the capitals that these representatives represent in the Council have absolutely no interest in any investigation. They do not need facts or precise evidence. They need to see a political order carried out.

On 23 January, Russia announced the launch in the Security Council of expert efforts to draft a resolution establishing a new investigative entity for incidents involving the use of chemical weapons to replace the defunct OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism, which was killed by the United States and its allies when they blocked the draft resolution (S/2017/968) that we proposed, together with China and Bolivia, designed to ensure that the Mechanism could be genuinely independent and professional. Not only do they not recall that episode, they have made strenuous attempts to convince the Security Council and the world community of the opposite. It has become clear that some of our partners are not prepared to consider this possibility. They want a second JIM that would continue to rubber-stamp the scientifically and technically ridiculous anti-Damascus conclusions on the basis of disinformation generously supplied by militant groups. They have long had a persistent allergy to the pressing need to pay close attention to the activities of terrorist groups, both in Syria and beyond its borders, in the context of manipulating toxic substances.

In the realization that we will not allow the now entirely discredited JIM to be revived, Syria's opponents are now attempting to take alternative routes, cobbling together narrow groups of like-minded people. However, they are forgetting that in doing that they are undermining the authority of international bodies, particularly the United Nations and the OPCW, and destroying the international architecture on the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Any initiatives in the context of the use of chemical weapons that circumvent the OPCW would be illegitimate. We certainly hope that the leadership of the United Nations Secretariat and the OPCW Technical Secretariat will make a firm show of will and distance themselves from such dubious projects.

We are ready to accept a press statement on the Syrian chemical issue, but not the one proposed by its sponsors, because in its current form its purpose is quite clearly to blame the Government of Syria for what is so far the unproved use of chemical weapons. Somehow the draft statement does not say anything about the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic, but the reference to Article 7 of the Charter of the United Nations leaves no doubt as to its essence. We cannot accept any still unconfirmed references to the use of chemical weapons without a credible investigation, nor can we accept any threats to a sovereign State for unproved actions. For some reason, eastern Ghouta has been dragged into the statement. I would like to remind the Council that last week we were prepared to accept an agreed-on draft presidential statement on the humanitarian situation in Syria. But our partners preferred to reject it. We are ready to accept a press statement, but not as it is proposed by our colleagues. We have proposed amendments to it that we are ready to circulate and agree on in that form.

Mr. Tanoh-Boutchoue (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): I would like to congratulate Kuwait through you, Mr. President, on its accession to the presidency of the Security Council for the month of February, to wish it every success and assure it of Côte d'Ivoire's cooperation. I would also like to thank Ms. Izumi Nakamitsu, High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, for her excellent briefing.

My delegation commends the work of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons through its Fact-finding Mission with regard to the dismantling of Syria's chemical-weapon stocks. We encourage the Syrian Government to comply with decisions regarding the destruction of its chemical arsenal.

My delegation is seriously concerned about the reports in the past week once again alleging the possible use of chemical weapons in the conflict in Syria, particularly in eastern Ghouta, where 21 cases of suffocation have been reported. They represent a significant reversal in our efforts to combat impunity with regard to the use of chemical weapons in Syria. The suffering inflicted on the Syrian people is intolerable and must be ended. In that regard, my country calls for continued efforts to implement resolution 2118 (2013), which provides for the complete dismantling of the Syrian chemical-weapons arsenal.

These new allegations of the use of chemical weapons once again call into question the Council's responsibility, particularly in terms of putting an end to these acts as soon as possible and of clearly identifying the perpetrators of such criminal acts. In its latest statement on the issue of chemical weapons in Syria (see S/PV.8164), my delegation warned against the Council's failure to act, which could be interpreted by those involved in the use of such weapons in Syria as a weakness of this organ and licence to act with impunity. Clearly, those who commit these despicable acts will continue to do so as long as the Council remains divided about the need to set up a consensus-based framework capable of identifying perpetrators and bringing them to justice. My delegation therefore encourages all ongoing initiatives that support the establishment of an accountability mechanism acceptable to all.

In conclusion, Côte d'Ivoire reiterates its strong condemnation of the use of chemical weapons in Syria and calls upon the relevant United Nations mechanisms to shed light on the new allegations of the use of such weapons. My delegation eagerly awaits the conclusions of the report that will be submitted after the second round of inspections conducted at the Scientific Studies and Research Centre in Syria.

Mr. Wu Haitao (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China congratulates Kuwait on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for the current month. We also commend Kazakhstan for its accomplishments during its presidency last month. I wish to thank the High Representative Nakamitsu for her briefing.

China welcomes the progress achieved in the verification and destruction of the two remaining chemical-weapon facilities within Syria's borders. We support the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) in continuing its coordination and cooperation with the Syrian Government so as to properly settle all the questions revolving around the initial declarations of chemical weapons by Syria through the OPCW platform.

China expresses its deepest sympathy to the Syrian people for their suffering as the result of chemical weapons. No use of chemical weapons will be tolerated. Lately, there have been some media reports of suspected use of chlorine and other poisonous chemicals as weapons within Syria's borders, over which China wishes to register its deepest concern. It is hoped that

the parties will carry out verification of the related incidents as soon as possible.

When it comes to the question of chemical weapons, China's position is as clear cut as it is consistent. We stand firmly against the use of chemical weapons by any country, organization or individual for whatever purpose and under any circumstances. China supports conducting comprehensive, objective and impartial investigations into any alleged use of chemical weapons within Syrian borders so as to come up with results that withstand the test of time, square with the facts and help bring the perpetrators to justice.

Establishing a new chemical-weapon investigative mechanism is critical to getting to the bottom of the chemical-weapon incidents as well as warding off any future recurrences in Syria. All Council parties should work together to that end. China supports the efforts on the part of Russia to promote the establishment of a new investigative mechanism into the use of chemical weapons in Syria. We hope that the members of the Council will continue to engage in constructive consultations so as to achieve consensus at an early date.

The chemical-weapon issue in Syria is closely related to a political settlement to the Syrian situation. Major achievements have been made at the Syrian National Dialogue Congress, held recently in Sochi, which played a positive role in advancing the Syrian political process, while lending impetus to relaunching the Geneva talks. It is China's hope that relevant parties will support the Security Council and the OPCW in continuing to act as the main channel for tackling the Syrian chemical-weapon issue, adopt a constructive attitude, seek proper solutions through consultation, maintain the unity of the Council and work with the United Nations and with the relevant parties in advancing the political process in Syria.

Mr. Van Oosterom (Netherlands): As this is the first time that I take the floor under the Kuwaiti presidency of the Security Council, I would like to congratulate and honour Kuwait's assumption of the presidency by trying to offer my thanks in Arabic.

(*spoke in Arabic*)

Thank you, Mr. President.

(*spoke in English*)

I would also like to thank Ms. Nakamitsu for her comprehensive and clear briefing.

I will address three issues today: first, reports of the renewed use of chemical weapons in Syria; secondly, the need for accountability; and, thirdly, the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) report at hand (S/2018/84, annex).

With respect to the renewed use of chemical weapons in the past weeks, the Kingdom of the Netherlands is shocked at the recent reports of chemical attacks in Syria, including this weekend and last night. We are outraged. In Douma, in eastern Ghouta, and last night in Saraqeb, in Idlib, innocent civilians, including children, have become victims once again of horrible chemical-weapon attacks. Such attacks deserve the strongest condemnation of the Security Council as violations of international law. Furthermore, recent OPCW laboratory tests show that samples of the chemical attack on Ghouta in August 2013 correspond to the chemical-weapons arsenal declared by the Syrian regime in 2014 and the Khan Shaykun attack in 2017. This confirms once again that the Al-Assad regime uses chemical weapons against its own population. We pay tribute to the work of the White Helmets, who have saved more a 100,000 civilians from the rubble of the Syrian war.

The use of chemical weapons should never go unpunished. Impunity erodes the important prohibition against the use of chemical weapons. It is inconceivable that impunity now reigns, which brings me to my second point, namely, the need for accountability.

As others have said, we had a well-functioning and professional mechanism to ensure accountability for the use of chemical weapons in Syria, the Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM). The JIM repeatedly determined the use of chemical weapons by the Syrian regime and by Da'esh. It had a strong mandate to investigate and identify perpetrators independently from the politics of the Security Council. And it did so accordingly, but the renewal of its mandate fell victim to the repeated use of the veto.

However, that does not mean that we now need to settle for less. The Kingdom of the Netherlands is prepared to work together on any proposal that strengthens accountability and the international rule of law. But let me emphasize that a weak accountability mechanism is not an option. For us, the fundamental characteristics of any accountability mechanism are the principles of impartiality, independence, comprehensiveness and effectiveness.

In order to uphold those principles, a mechanism should at least meet the following requirements. First, it should operate independently from the Security Council, including when it comes to the attribution of guilt. It should be impartial. The separation of powers is necessary to prevent undue politicization. Secondly, the mechanism should be effective; it should independently decide how it will conduct its investigations, including when it comes to analysing facts and assessing the quality of evidence. Lastly, it should be comprehensive and investigate and identify perpetrators among all parties to the armed conflict — both State and non-State actors. The draft resolution that is currently being discussed has not yet met those important principles.

That brings me to my third point, namely, the fifty-second OPCW report (S/2018/84, annex), which the High Representative presented very clearly in her briefing. The report points out that, unfortunately, too little progress has been made by the Syrian authorities in addressing the outstanding questions that the OPCW posed about the declaration of the Syrian authorities. It is essential that the Syrian authorities cooperate seriously with the OPCW. The Kingdom of the Netherlands supports the continuation of the work of OPCW Fact-finding Mission. We call on all States to ensure that the Fact-finding Mission can continue its work independently.

In conclusion, we stand ready to adopt the draft press statement, as circulated before. We are convinced that the Security Council cannot allow the continued use of chemical weapons to go unpunished. Impunity is a curse; accountability is a must. The Council has to act. As long as the Council is blocked from achieving accountability by the use of the veto, we will also continue our efforts outside the Council. We therefore strongly support other accountability initiatives for Syria, such as the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism for the Syrian Arab Republic and the Human Rights Council's Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic. We also support the International Partnership against Impunity for the Use of Chemical Weapons, which was just highlighted by our French colleague. However, let me repeat what I have said in the Chamber before, the Council should refer the situation in Syria, especially the mass atrocities committed in the conflict, to the International Criminal Court in The Hague.

Mr. Alemu (Ethiopia): We are very pleased to see you, Mr. President, assuming responsibility for the presidency. I wish to thank High Representative Izumi Nakamitsu for her briefing, which, as always, we found to be balanced, and therefore useful. We are in need of that kind of approach. Frankly speaking, we need that very desperately. During times such as this, when we seem to be so deeply divided, the role of United Nations officials like her becomes all the more critical. We thank her.

We remain deeply concerned by the continued reports on the use of chemical weapons in Syria. We strongly condemn the use of chemical weapons by any actor, State and non-State alike, in Syria or anywhere else. As we have stated repeatedly, the use of chemical weapons is totally unjustifiable under any circumstances. It constitutes a threat to international peace and security and undermines the international non-proliferation architecture. We cannot agree more with what the Secretary-General stated in the concluding paragraph of his letter of 1 February:

> "The fact of these continuing allegations again highlights the shared obligation to identify and hold to account those responsible for the use of chemical weapons."

That is why the unity of the Council is absolutely important. Without it, the Council's ability to respond to grave threats to international peace and security, such as the use of chemicals as weapons, will be seriously hampered. In that regard, what High Representative Nakamitsu said a while ago is most relevant: "unity, not impunity".

Let me say that we regret that the Council was not able to renew the mandate of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism. If we are not able to address this institutional gap by drawing lessons from last year and forge the necessary unity and compromise, we will be sending the wrong message and encouraging impunity. The fact that chemical-weapon attacks have continued as recently as yesterday worries us very much. That is why it is so critical that we seek an independent way of establishing accountability.

We appreciate the initiative taken by the Russian Federation to propose a draft resolution on the establishment of a new mechanism, which has been the basis for discussion in recent days. This is a conversation that we welcome. As we continue to discuss this very important matter, our consultations should be constructive and forward-looking. Of course,

we are not naive; we have no illusions about how matters are becoming more and more complicated by the day. However, we still hope that the Council will restore its unity to reach common ground and create an independent, impartial and professional mechanism that will be able to identify those responsible for the use of chemical weapons in Syria, based on robust evidence.

We welcome that the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) has continued to assist the Syrian Government in destroying the remaining stationary above-ground facilities. As the High Representative stated, we hope the facilities will be totally eliminated in the coming month. We have just heard a very encouraging statement from the High Representative.

We note that the OPCW has translated and finalized its analysis of the 19 documents submitted by the Syrian Government. While we look forward to the final report, we encourage continued cooperation and meaningful communication between the Syrian Government and the OPCW that leads to tangible results to address the outstanding issues. We also note that its Fact-finding Mission has continued its investigation related to allegations of the use of chemical weapons in Syria. We look forward to its reports.

Let me conclude by again reiterating, at the risk of sounding naive, how the unity of the Council is vital to ensuring accountability and deterring and stopping the use of chemical weapons in Syria and elsewhere. We only hope that the challenge we face in this area is not a reflection of the growing lack of trust that characterizes international relations today, making joint action in most critical areas more complicated than it should be.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of Kuwait.

At the outset, I would like to thank the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, Ms. Izumi Nakamitsu, for the briefing she gave at the beginning of this meeting.

We had hoped that the Security Council's unanimous adoption of resolution 2118 (2013), in September 2013 following the first incident involving the use of chemical weapons in Syria, would have resolved this matter, since the Council had demonstrated unity and determination in confronting that crime with a view to ensuring that it not be repeated and that its perpetrators be held accountable. Consequently, we regret the substantial regression in addressing the chemical-weapon issue in Syria, which is a result of the divisions among Council members after the Council was unable to extend the mandate of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism in Syria, which we feel carried out its tasks in a very professional, impartial and independent manner.

We express our deep concern about the allegations of the continued use of chemical weapons in Syria, most recently during the attack in Douma, in eastern Ghouta, last week and during the attack that took place in Saraqeb, in Idlib, yesterday. This is the third such attack during the past few weeks, which means that the perpetrators of those crimes will go unpunished and that there is no guarantee that they, or anyone else, who commits such crimes in the future will be held accountable, after we lost the Joint Investigative Mechanism.

The position of the State of Kuwait is a principled and steadfast one that strongly condemns any use of chemical weapons, wherever, whenever and by whomsoever, as this is considered a grave violation of international law. We reiterate the need to hold accountable those responsible for such use, be they individuals, entities, non-State groups or Governments.

In that context, we condemn the use of heavy and destructive weapons as well as the targeting civilians and residential areas killing dozens of innocent victims. These weapons target health facilities and civilian locations in eastern Ghouta, Idlib and other areas. We therefore support the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism for Syria in its quest to gather evidence and investigate the crimes committed against civilians in order to hold the perpetrators accountable.

The State of Kuwait will support any alternative or mechanism that enjoys the consensus of all members of the Security Council and ensures the independence, neutrality and professionalism of any new future mechanism. In that regard, we reaffirm that the primary responsibility of any mechanism must be to determine the identity of those using chemical weapons in Syria, provided that the Security Council would then play its role and hold the perpetrators accountable, in implementation of the principle of ending impunity and of resolution 2118 (2013), which undoubtedly stipulates the imperative need for, and importance of, holding accountable those responsible for the use of chemical

weapons in Syria. We also look forward to receiving the report that will soon be submitted by the Fact-finding Mission, as mentioned by Ms. Nakamitsu in her earlier briefing on the most recent incidents, as well as her reports on the use of chlorine gas in Saraqib.

In conclusion, we reiterate our full readiness to take part in any efforts that are aimed at reaching consensus among Security Council members and at holding accountable the perpetrators of such internationally prohibited crimes. We assert that a political solution in Syria is the only way to arrive at a comprehensive settlement of the crisis, in accordance with the relevant Security Council resolutions, especially resolution 2254 (2015) and the 2012 Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex).

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

The representative of the United Kingdom has asked for the floor to make a further statement.

Mr. Allen (United Kingdom): I disagree with a lot of what my Russian colleague said, but I will not stretch my colleagues' patience. But I do feel compelled briefly to respond to several of the points that he made.

The first point is to say that this is not political for us. Preventing the use of these abhorrent weapons should transcend political disagreements. We do not oppose Russia's important role in Syria at all. We noted the outcomes of Sochi, and we look forward to the proposal for a constitutional committee returning to the next round of Geneva talks, with the full participation of Russia and the Syrian authorities, as was laid out in resolution 2254 (2015).

The second point I would simply make is that the notion that it was anyone other than Russia that ended the Joint Investigative Mechanism is absurd. The voting records of the Council are clear and are available to all. Russia vetoed three different proposals for the extension of the Mechanism, the last of which simply extended it for a short period and requested the Secretary-General to make recommendations, but even that was unacceptable.

Finally, on a note of agreement, I just want, like my Dutch colleague, to praise the incredible work of the White Helmets, who risk their own lives on a daily basis to save thousands of Syrians civilians.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Mounzer (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): My country condemns and rejects in the strongest possible terms any use of chemical weapons or of any other weapon of mass destruction, as this constitutes a crime against humanity and an unethical and unjustifiable act, under any circumstances. The real target of such weapons is the Syrian people, who remain the primary victims of the crimes committed by armed terrorist groups, which have not hesitated to use chemical weapons against them. I reaffirm before the Security Council that my country has sought, and continues to seek, to identify the real perpetrators responsible for the use of chemical weapons in my country, Syria.

Based on those steadfast principles, my Government joined the Chemical Weapons Convention and has honoured all of its commitments thereunder. My country achieved an unprecedented and definitive feat in the history of the Organization by ending the Syrian chemical-weapons programme in record time. That was corroborated in the report of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism to the Council in June 2014.

My country is the party most desirous of uncovering the truth. We have always supported, and will continue to support, in principle any initiative by the Council whose aim is to establish the truth, identify those who are really trading in the blood of the Syrian people and using toxic chemical substances against Syrian civilians, including armed terrorist groups, as well as levelling false accusations against the Syrian Government.

In that regard, on behalf of the Government of my country, I once again reiterate our condemnation of all American and Western allegations accusing us of committing chemical-weapon attacks in our country. I reaffirm that those accusations are groundless and cheap lies. International public opinion and the majority of United Nations Members now know that this is but standard procedure for the United States and its allies in the Council each and every time they learn that the armed terrorist groups that they finance, arm and support on the ground in Syria are at an impasse and losing ground to the advancing Syrian army and its allies. The latter are today waging a war, on behalf of the entire world, against terrorism, which, unfortunately, is being supported by certain Governments that have no interest

in ensuring international peace and security and are solely seeking to advance their own political agendas.

My Government reaffirms once again that the United States, the United Kingdom and France are fully responsible for the paralysis of international investigative mechanisms concerning the use of toxic chemical substances, as the Governments of those States are seeking to shield the armed terrorist groups that they support. We recall before all present here that it is Syria that originally called for an investigation into instances of the use of toxic gas by armed terrorist groups.

False accusations against my Government of using toxic chemical substances are attempts to cover up its efforts to reveal to the world that certain armed terrorist groups and their sponsors have continued to perpetrate crimes against innocent civilians through the use, more than once, of toxic substances. The Syrian Government has provided the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) with evidence that proves that such groups possess banned toxic substances. We have repeatedly called for the carrying out of investigations to corroborate such evidence. However, our calls have been ignored.

All of my colleagues here recall that the United States and its allies destroyed the JIM. Through their practices here in the Council, they put an end to the Mechanism. They brought pressure to bear on its Chair and its members by pressuring them to refuse to visit Khan Shaykhun. Rather than conduct a field visit to collect real evidence, they merely sought to level accusations and offered up evidence trumped up by Western countries to undermine Syria, to support terrorist groups and to cover up their responsibility for this incident. That occurred after the United States and its partners rejected the call by the Russian Federation to stop the politicization of the work of the JIM and to rectify its methodology by refraining from using false evidence and, instead, limiting itself to scientific and legally sound and reasonable proof.

My country continues to honour all of its commitments — the ones we assumed when we joined the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on Their Destruction. We shall persevere in our fight against terrorism — a war that we will wage despite any political or media blackmail or any exploitation of the blood of innocent civilians in Syria. The Permanent Mission of the Syrian Arab Republic will today circulate a letter of the National Committee for the Implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention, in response to the United States allegations vis-à-vis the work of the JIM and the Fact-finding Mission of the OPCW. The letter proves with scientific and legal evidence that the accusations against my country are false and that Syria has never used such chemicals, and will we ever use them, because we do not possess them. Let us recall that those who level such false accusations against Syria are the Governments of the same States with a dark history of using such internationally prohibited weapons against millions of innocent people — in Viet Nam, Cambodia, Algeria and the list goes on.

Finally, on behalf of my Government, I would like to extend our gratitude to the Russian Federation and to friendly countries in the Council, countries that seek to establish truth based on their awareness about the pernicious aims behind the false accusations. They have demonstrated their commitment to the supremacy of the principles of international law and the Charter of the United Nations, as well as their conviction that such abnormal practices undermine the credibility of international actions and institutions and jeopardize international peace and security.

The meeting rose at 11.45 a.m.